New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1946

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"Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker"

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 11, 1946

God and the Devil Meet in Tennessee

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker," which opened last night at the Music Box, is modern folk lore in a sophisticated and not very successful vein.

This tale of God and the devil meeting on a visit to a Tennessee valley has a good deal of right scandalous talk in it. It starts off in high good humor that is irreverent because it is down to earth. The comment is startling, but not sacrilegious.

When the time comes to state a moral, the humor is forgotten and there is a terrible letdown.

What would have been bright, timely wit before the war, gets laughs, but now seems dated. Jokes about the TVA and the WPA sound somehow revived.

The author of the play represents the devil as Mr. Hooker, God as Mr. Peebles and the Stranger as the latter's mild-mannered son.

Valley Full of Sinners.

Brother Wally, a young preacher, is happily situated with a new church, an attractive fiancee, and a valley full of sinners to work on.

Mr. Peebles, who wears overalls when he is not working at his job in a gold cape, has decided to sponsor Wally and inspire his sermons.

Mr. Hooker sees a perfect setup for a broken commandment in the attraction of wealthy Mrs. Craine for Wally. He sees that the breaking takes place.

Mrs. Craine's husband, whose church Wally is to work for, dynamites a picnic of local unions.

In the riots that follow lynchings occur, and the mob seeks the arrest of the stranger whom they accuse of making rabble-rousing speeches.

In a brief moment of wearing Mr. Peebles' mantle, the Stranger brings harmony to the lynchers and their victims. But when Mr. Peebles offers to save him, he refuses. Love for God's ways must come from men's hearts.

Mr. Peebles makes Wally repent before he will save him from the wound he got when the rejected Mrs. Craine shot him. Then he sends Wally and his sweetheart out of the valley to preach, while he floods the sinful place.

This is all very diffuse. There are bright moments, but the general direction is hard to follow.

The Real Struggle.

The real struggle is between the forgiving Stranger and a God of Wrath.

Howard Smith is a powerful figure as the stubborn and not very discerning Mr. Peebles. He never lets his earthly conversation seem offensive.

Rhys Williams is mischievous and skittish as Mr. Hooker, who sits by his stove and looks at pin-up girls through a magnifying glass. He has a good time as a lucifer who is distressed by the lack of "pleasure sinning," and fearful of the hate he has sown.

Tom Coley is a fervent Wally and Dorothy Gilchrist makes a pleasant sweetheart for him.

'MR. PEEBLES AND MR. HOOKER.'

Play by Edward E. Paramore Jr., based on the novel by Charles G. Givens; directed by Martin Ritt; settings by Frederick Fox; costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith; presented by Joseph M. Hyman at the Music Box Thursday, October 10, 1946. The cast:

Hank	James Robertson
Brother Alf Leland	Paul Huber
Hattie	Juanita Hall
Brother Wally Leland	Tom Coley
Bump Sorrell	Arthur Hunnicutt
Ellen Sorrell	Dorothy Gilchrist
Chauffeur	Van Prince
Mrs. Hatcher Craine	Randee Sanford
Nate Corbett	Grover Burgess
Mr. Hooker	Rhys Williams
Sheriff Todd Blakely	Ralph Stantley
Pete	Arthur Foran
Deputy	Charles Thompson
Mr. Hatcher Craine	Neil Skinner
Dr. Phil Jameson	Tom Morgan
Judge Payette	Tom Holer
Mr. Peebles	Howard Smith
A Stranger	Jeff Marrow
Whigery	Ken Renard
Joe Greer	Dennis Behan

Slick Performance.

Randee Sanford gives a slick insinuating performance as Mrs. Craine, and Juanita Hall makes the most of her laughs in the part of the cook. She it is who remarks that "color don't make no difference to the Communist religion just so you is low down enough."

Some of the best comedy comes from the playing in the first act of Arthur Hunnicutt and Paul Huber, as the heroine's father and the hero's grandfather.

Despite its gags, you are likely to wonder just what "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" is all about.

Journal American

OCTOBER 11, 1946

'Peebles and Hooker' At the Music Box

By ROBERT GARLAND

With the best intention in the world, that of peace on earth, good will toward men, "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" now occupies the stage of the Music Box, Irving Berlin's pretty playhouse in 45th st. This, in case you hadn't heard, is the miracle-play in modern dress Edward Paramore made up out of his own head and a novel by Charles Givins.

The outcome of the Paramore-Givins get-together is, believe me, a retelling of the Faustus legend, with the conflict taking place in an American valley, 'way down south in Tennessee. Somehow or other, the spirit of Franklin Roosevelt hovers about the dam site, although it is Mr. Hooker who is Old Boy Mephistopheles.

After its speculative fashion, "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" is a post-World War II passion-play as well. There is no mistaking The Stranger who preaches practical Christianity there within the valley, and, against His Father's—Mr. Peebles'—better judgment, puts it into practice. Small wonder they take him off to the local Golgotha.

But, despite the simple symbolism of Mr. Peebles, who is the Father; The Stranger, who is the Son, and the Mr. Hooker who is certainly Mr. Peebles' ancient adversary, the new occupant of Irving Berlin's pretty playhouse is not without its overtones of humor. In fact, its moods are many and unpredictable, making for variety rather than for drama...

Apostolic variety, like playing in a pulpit.

• • •

Sacred Scenario

As, after Hank, the hillbilly, gives out his ballad of godlike events to come, the miracle-play in modern dress, the post-World War II passion-play Edward Paramore made up out of his own head and a novel by Charles Givins, gets under way within the Tennessee Valley home of old Alf Leland. Brother Alf is a servant of the Lord.

He, by celestial short-wave, knows that his time is come. So, sitting in his rocking chair on a soft midsummer's noon, he awaits the coming of the Mr. Peebles who is not only a stranger in the house but a deity—The Deity—in Alf Leland's faith-filled eyes. The Deity who, for all His modern mufti, is straight from the Old Testament.

Mr. Peebles soon appears. With blandness in His countenance and honey on His tongue, he wears thunderbolts around His shoulders as if they were a cape. For The Lord, Brother Alf's own God, is a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children of The Valley unto the third and fourth generation.

Into this not always pretty picture comes The Stranger, who is Mr. Peebles' Son; Mr. Hooker, who is Mr. Peebles' Ancient Adversary; Mrs. Hatcher Craine, who is a modern Magdalen; Brother Wally, who is going to be a disciple, and Ellen Sorrell, who is going to be his helpmate. And such others as are needed to parallel the sacred scenario...

They add up to quite a goodly company.

• • •

Canvas Tennessee

Heading this goodly company are Howard Smith, as the holy Mr. Peebles, and Rhys Williams, as the unholy Mr. Hooker. To keep things true to life—and the life everlasting, when you think of it!—the unholy Mr. Hooker has the greater fun. But the holy Mr. Peebles is not without his funny bone.

Paul Huber, always excellent, is to the rocking chair born as Brother Alf Leland. Tom Coley is a rising young player to hear and see as the younger brother of the house of Leland who believes he has a "call!" As the Tennessee Sorrells, Bump and Ellen, Arthur Hunnicutt and Dorothy Gilchrist are fine.

So are the others who, looked back upon, are headed by the Juanita Hall who pretends to be a beaten-biscuit maid. But, beneath the uneasy direction of Martin Ritt, they seem not quite to know when the "variety" dies down and the "drama" comes back to Tennessee. It's a canvas Tennessee, designed by Frederick Fox.

It's always worthy of him, too, as the miracle-passion-play moves slowly but unsurely from Brother Leland's house to Mr. Hooker's shack and back again. As the Paramore-Givins narrative talks its uneven way from house to shack and back to house again, you wish it would get a move on and tell one story at a time...

Instead, it sermonizes, which may be its undoing.

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The New York Times

OCTOBER 11, 1946

'Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker' Applies a Religious Fable to a Tennessee Mountain Community

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Being in a reflective mood, Edward E. Paramore Jr., has written a folksy play with a message, based on a novel by Charles G. Givens. Mr. Paramore calls it "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker," and it was put on at the Music Box last evening. In view of the world's indifference to the teachings of God and the philosophy of Jesus, Mr. Paramore has started speculating on what might happen if God and His Son and also the devil concentrated their respective attentions on a small Tennessee town that has got out of control. To avoid any awkwardness that such a project might occasion in such a worldly canyon as Broadway, Mr. Paramore represents God as Mr. Peebles, a local sort of preacher, the devil as frisky Mr. Hooker and Jesus as a mild-mannered carpenter and revolutionary who is again trying his philosophy of love.

* * *

For the space of one act, before the supernatural sequences begin, "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" is completely delightful. For this is the part of the play that includes a spirited and crusty character, Brother Alf Leland, a Southern preacher who hates that Yankee Roosevelt and the sinful New Deal as violently as he hates the devil. In this introductory scene, set in a mountain cabin with the hills rising outside, Mr. Paramore is writing his most original scenes—friendly and humorous, hospitable and tender, stirring sinful folkways and rough-edged piety into the most original and disarming episode of the season.

To say that the rest of the play does not quite come off is to offer nothing very illuminating by way of comment. But it is difficult to define the infirmities of this odd and often ingratiating play. It is Mr. Paramore's notion to portray God as a sociable human being puzzled over the problem of the world's iniquity. But perhaps an audience is incapable of accepting God on such familiar terms. In "The Green Pastures" you will remember the Lawd was an upright person with remarkable stature, particularly in the inspired acting of the late Richard B. Harrison. But Mr. Peebles' folksy manners with the characters of this play rob him of any distinction, and, indeed, make him seem considerably inferior to Brother Alf Leland, who had character.

But perhaps the trouble with "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" is that it tries to cover too much ground and spreads thin in too many directions. For Mr. Peebles not only has to wrestle with the problem of the devil's irritating depredations and sin between a likely young preacher and a torrid married woman, but he has also to reckon with labor clashes and race violence. Mr. Peebles never seems to solve anything or get anything settled. In Mr. Paramore's characterization Mr. Peebles is never much more coherent than a supernatural being with a patronizing attitude towards human beings.

And that, of course, is the way Howard Smith plays the part—down to earth but also pompous. Mr. Smith's stature does not go much beyond his physical height and the bulging stomach he thrusts into the play. Since the devil is a much more ingratiating fellow, Rhys Williams perhaps has an easier assignment, but he acts Mr. Hooker with skill and sardonic artfulness. Tom Coley gives a sincere portrait as the callow hillbilly preacher. Dorothy Gilchrist is excellent as his sweetheart; and Arthur Hunnicutt gives a droll performance as her father.

But the gem of the evening is Paul Huber's acting of Brother Alf, the godly firebrand of the valley. Petulant, domineering, bitterly prejudiced, also pathetic, Mr. Huber helps to make Brother Alf a delightfully full-drawn character. The best part of "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" vanishes when Mr. Peebles casually destroys Brother Alf at the end of the first act. It is hard to forgive Mr. Peebles for such omnipotence.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 11, 1946

'Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker' Has Delightful Start, Heavy Ending

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I have always had a comfortable notion that I could tell—or anybody with half a head could tell—within the first few moments whether or not a play was going to be good. The good ones, I've said—and many others have said—have an air about them, a feeling, a mark of confidence right from the start.

Now I am sadder and perhaps wiser, for seldom has a play begun so well, so charmingly, as did "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" at the Music Box last evening. It began well; it carried gaily through the first act; it faltered slightly and unimportantly in the second. And then—smack! In the third it hit some invisible stone wall, stopped dead in its tracks and fell apart. I came away baffled, wondering if maybe the whole cast hadn't suddenly dried up in its lines and left out the most important part of all.

"Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" might have been a hillbilly "Green Pastures," a Tennessee "Devil and Daniel Webster." In its early portions it has some uncommonly flavorsome mountain talk, some delightful humor and a great deal of deft, airy imagination.

Its opening is instantly arresting—a balladeer with a guitar singing before a backdrop which pictures a great reservoir nestling in the Tennessee mountains. His ballad relates that some people say this lake was created by Roosevelt as part of the TVA, but others say it was the wrath of the Lord God Jehovah which did it.

And the play is what these others say. The singer travels off, and the backdrop with him, and here in the hills is the home of old Brother Alf Leland, a hill preacher, and his grandson, Brother Wally, who has felt the urge to preach but hasn't had The Word yet.

Expects a Visitor.

Old Brother Alf is a fine, crusty character, played with gusto by Paul Huber. Old Brother Alf gets the news of his flock from a Negro womanservant, about union organizers in the town and about how there's a new law about minimum wages — this is in 1939 — and a Negro womanservant ought to be getting $10 a week instead of the dollar she's getting. Brother Alf settles her problem by explaining to her that, since he's a servant of the Lord, she is, too, and laws don't hold because you can't put the Lord in jail.

But union and wage problems are less important to Brother Alf than the impending visit of a Mr. Peebles, who, Alf suspects, will be the Lord himself. Mr. Peebles does arrive—and so does another stranger, Mr. Hooker, who has occupied a tin shack and keeps a potbellied stove red-hot in it in the middle of Summer.

These gentlemen are, indeed, the Lord and the Devil, each come to the valley on private business. They do considerable business, with Mr. Hooker offering fun and temptation and Mr. Peebles waxing wroth. For Mr. Peebles is the wrathful Jehovah of the Old Testament.

Fantasy about Biblical characters must be handled with a precise rightness or it is awful; and the fantasy of the early part of the play is right and is great fun. Mr. Hooker doesn't quite fit into the mountain scene, but Mr. Peebles does. He is walking the earth like a natcheral man and he looks and talks like a mountaineer. He passes a miracle or two, but finally gets sore, takes a Stillson wrench, opens the sluices of the Roosevelt Dam and floods a sinful village.

A Switch in Moods.

But somehow the reason for the flooding is mixed up. The author has got his sinful town involved in strikes, riots and race problems. He brings in Jesus, in the guise of a young carpenter, and Jesus fails to achieve peace. Indeed, a sheriff arrests the carpenter as a rabble-rouser. The Christian principle of forgiveness has failed once more, so Mr. Peebles gets out his wrench.

Thus it is that what begins as a folk fantasy switches from humorous to serious vein, and in the serious part it is neither good fantasy nor good theatre. This is a pity, for so much of the writing is so good, the acting of Howard Smith as Peebles and Rhys Williams as Hooker is so enjoyable, and the settings by Frederick Fox are so fitting.

The play has been adapted by E. E. Paramore Jr. from a novel by Charles Givens. If I were a minor Jehovah able to be of real help, instead of a mortal tossing some small critical thunderbolts, I'd have fixed it so that the producer, Joseph M. Hyman, had the money, the patience, the time and the know-how to nurse a promising script along. I'd have let him tinker with it a year or two, and made him coax Mr. Paramore and Mr. Givens to work and work until they had that last part just right. And I'd have done a good thing.

"Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 11, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Take to the Hills!

JEHOVAH and Satan wander through a remarkably tasteless and tedious charade in the new Music Box offering. "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" pretends to be a modern morality play as the Lord and the Devil scrutinize various sinners in a Tennessee valley community before it is flooded by the T. V. A. It succeeds in being merely a vulgar jape. The hillbilly dialogue of this Edward E. Paramore jr. conceit has a certain salty quality, but it is generally as humorous as an overworked profanity. The characters have the dimensions of comic strip figures and the plot is a jumble of Scriptural quotations and class struggle catchwords.

* * *

The confusion of the script is not lessened by the appearance of a Stranger, a carpenter who is related to one of the misters of the title. There is quite a family argument at one point and a sheriff arrives eventually with a John Doe warrant for the principal agitator in the proceedings. By this time, you may have grasped something of whatever the author had in mind in adapting Charles G. Givens's novel to the stage. If you care to risk being both offended and bored, see "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker."

* * *

Several good players are trapped in the nonsense. They do what they can to make the production palatable, but it still resembles a fresh fish left too long in the sun. Howard Smith portrays Mr. Peebles, discarding his Godhead to stake out a new garden of Eden in the deep South, but thinking better of the project before the final curtain. Rhys Williams matches his hail-fellow-well-met portrayal with a ribald portrait of Mr. Hooker and Jeff Morrow attitudinizes a bit bewilderedly as the Stranger.

* * *

The sinners do not fare so badly. Tom Coley is forthright as an aspirant preacher who falls for the wife of the reactionary mill owner. Dorothy Gilchrist has a vital bit or two of business as his normal and nice sweetheart. The whole company is to be commisserated. It has a real sow's ear to work with.

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PM

OCTOBER 13, 1946

—*Kronenberger*

Devil Takes The Hindmost

PM Reviews

It is usual enough to mention God and the devil in a sermon, but Mr. Paramore has actually put them in the pulpit. There, clad and cognomened as Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker, they wage the battle of good and evil in a small Tennessee town. Mr. Paramore is clearly on God's side, but God is much less solidly on Mr. Paramore's; and this didactic fantasy, unorthodox, is also very ineffective and a little unpalatable. As a plea for decency and good will—in which Jesus, too, takes a part—it stops with those good intentions which Dr. Johnson consigned to Mr. Hooker's part of the world.

Mr. Paramore gets off to an agreeable enough start with a couple of strictly native and racy Tennesseans—a bawling diehard old preacher and a foul-mouthed sort of Tobacco Roader who is willing to work now and then; but these earthlings are soon shunted off the stage, and with them goes the play. When God, looking like a hodcarrier, and Satan, looking like a rural vestryman, come to grips over carnal crises, race problems and labor troubles, Mr. Paramore is so busy making lowbrows of them that their uplift and downlift seem of secondary importance. In any fantasy, the author's touch, his sense of tact, is the decisive thing; in a fantasy involving God, Jesus and the devil it needs to be twice as delicate and sensitive. Mr. Paramore, who has some knack for broadjump humor, has none at all for the tightrope of fantasy; and as his sermonizing grows duller and fuzzier, his cosmic slapstick grows more appalling. Satan, I suspect, possesses more style than Mr. Paramore allots him; and I'm sure that God has more taste.

One need not be too hard, however. *Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker* is an understandable however bad mistake, one of those seductive-looking ideas with which the Devil might tempt almost any author to his destruction. Paul Huber and Arthur Hunnicutt labor well in it, let me add; and in the title roles, Howard Smith and Rhys Williams struggle valiantly.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

OCTOBER 11, 1946

A Feeble Biblical Battle In the Tennessee Hills

—— By Richard Watts Jr. ——

Possibly Marc Connelly will have to be blamed for it. Ever since he wrote a play called "The Green Pastures" and it turned out to be one of the undisputed classics of the modern theatre, ambitious playwrights must have been tempted to try dramas that would treat of biblical subjects in American folk terms. Apparently when Edward E. Paramore Jr. came upon a novel by Charles G. Givens, which dealt with a personal conflict between God and the Devil, both walking the earth as natural men, in the Tennessee of 1939, the temptation was beyond his endurance. The result, regrettably, is "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker."

According to the dramatized fable, God, at the time, was pleased to walk the pleasant Tennessee hills and valleys in the guise of a fatherly old fellow called Mr. Peebles, while the Devil was prowling in the vicinity jovially disguised as the slightly lecherously Mr. Hooker (It must certainly give away something about my character to confess that each time I write the title of Mr. Paramore's play I start to call it "Mr. Hooker and Mr. Peebles"!).

Anyway, it appears that Mr. Peebles was toying with the idea of making the Tennesseans the Chosen People for a while, feeling that the Jews deserved a rest from such a trying assignment. He made the distressing discovery that various malignant matters like sex, race hatred and economic injustices were causing a lot of trouble, and, after there had been a race riot and a sex shooting, decided to do something about it. I am not quite clear as to what it was, but neither is Mr. Paramore. It doesn't work, whatever it was.

Mr. Hooker's Point

Unquestionably the play is on the side of Mr. Peebles, but it struck me that Mr. Hooker came out of it rather better. At least, when he points out to Mr. Peebles that the race and economic conflicts were considerably more obnoxious than the various sex derelictions and suggested that the old gentleman was possibly devoting too much time to shaking his head over the minor issue, it seemed that he had made at least a good debating point.

In fact, for all his heartiness, homespun philosophy and folksy amiability, Mr. Peebles is rather an aloof, distant and unsympathetic fellow, with a remarkably small amount of sympathy for anybody. In one of the few scenes of the play which actively embarrassed me, an ardent young man, billed as "A Stranger," who said that he was a carpenter by trade and called Mr. Peebles Father, pointed out the old gentleman's lack of pity, although I thought he did it less effectively than did Mr. Hooker.

If the two meetings between father and son are the only ones that are downright embarrassing, that is not to say that much of it can be recommended. The trouble, I think, is that Mr. Paramore selected a hopeless fable for dramatization in the first place. Then, having selected it, he found an understandable difficulty in deciding just what the mood was to be and what proportions of the humorous and the serious were required.

Mr. Peebles' Sparrow

He is considerably more successful in the lighter aspects. Mr. Hooker is rather amusingly drawn and there are moments in which Mr. Peebles grows sensitive about criticisms of his handiwork that are engaging. When, for example, someone speaks lightly of protecting a sparrow and the indignant Mr. Peebles asks him if he wants to make anything out of it, the play is at its best.

Since the first act is the sunniest, it has a bit of charm. It is somehow symbolic of the work that at the close of its best section, the author kills off one of its best characters, a narrow-minded old preacher who in his youth had been a good friend of Mr. Peebles. From then on everything is increasingly serious and increasingly futile.

The two title roles are ably played by Howard Smith as Mr. Peebles and by Rhys Williams as Mr. Hooker. Jeff Morrow tactfully and tastefully keeps the young carpenter from seeming too cloying, and Arthur Hunnicutt, who will never be forgotten by any one who saw him as the okie father in "Love's Old Sweet Song," is delightful in the small role of another disreputable parent. But the play is hopless after its first act.

The Sun

OCTOBER 11, 1946

The Music Box Has a Dreary Little Play in 'Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The exercises at the Music Box last night were about the Lord versus the Devil in the Tennessee hill country, and all of it recited somewhat exhaustingly, in "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker," a play by Edward E. Paramore Jr., based on a novel by Charles G. Givens. Joseph M. Hyman makes the presentation.

The Lord is personified by a Mr. Peebles, a strapping, drawling fellow in overalls, who dons a glittery cape when he decides to pass a miracle. The Devil comes forth as Mr. Hooker, glib and jovial and full of tricks, always handy with a pint of corn, and living in a little shack, heated by a red hot stove, down at the railroad crossing.

They come into conflict in a mill town in the Tennessee valley and there they battle for souls. Race riots, union trouble and no end of ruction have brought the valley country to the attention of the forces of good and evil and finally the Lord decides that drastic action is necessary. He orders the young preacher and his rural bride-to-be to flee to safety and then, with a gigantic wrench, opens the sluice gates and floods the countryside.

The acting in "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker" is only fair, if that. Howard Smith ambles about as Mr. Peebles, seemingly wishing he were back in as good a comedy as "Dear Ruth." Rhys Williams has a comic moment or two as the the jumpy Devil. Tom Coley is the young parson, who, with the Devil directing, got quite involved with the alluring blonde wife of the mill owner. Dorothy Gilchrist plays his girl. Martin Ritt has directed.

A dreary little play, this "Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker," and not worth the time put into it or the scenery Frederick Fox built for it.

****

"The Iceman Cometh"

Journal American

OCTOBER 10, 1946.

'Iceman Cometh' At Martin Beck

By ROBERT GARLAND

It was thoughtful of The Theatre Guild to invite us drama critics to dinner, which invitation I did not accept, and set us free an hour early, which time I did not require, so we could assess, well-fed and all unhurried, the merits or demerits of "The Iceman Cometh."

Especially thoughtful was it when you reflect that the merits or demerits of Eugene O'Neill's new play could be easily assessed by any of us local boys, after his own dinner and in his usual time. The squarest peg in the Critics Circle should need no second thinking.

Seldom in these theatre-going times has so much been written about so little. Seldom where my recollections are concerned. And never by a dramatist of Eugene O'Neill's high-and-mighty rating. Not even when you consider what, if anything, is meant between the lines.

Yesterday, from four-thirty until six, from seven until ten, a Martin - Beck - Theatre - full of earnest and attentive people listened earnestly and attentively to every word our First Playwright put in the mouths of his low, lo. quacious and alcoholic characters.

They were bad words, sad words and mad words: there were more four-letter words than a conservative back-fence would sponsor. But they failed to add up to anything of moment. Even in retrospect, on a contented stomach and with overtime for contemplation, they are wasted.

"The Iceman Cometh" is neither good Broadway, good Theatre Guild nor good Eugene O'Neill.

* * *

Waiting for Hickey

It hurts me more than it hurts Broadway, The Theatre Guild or Eugene O'Neill to admit that, during the protracted period of the work's unveiling, you feel as if a revival of "The Lower Depths" and a revival of an old-time vaudeville show were being staged concurrently.

Our First Playwright fills his stage with a group of ailing alcoholics right out of the finale of "Arsenic and Old Lace." To these he adds three unlovely ladies, two belligerent bartenders and one mysterious stranger, a sober hardware salesman known to all as "Hickey."

The entire first act might well be called "Waiting for Hickey." But, even if it isn't, Hickey at length arrives, bringing with him more than faint suggestions of that passer in the third floor back, that stranger in the house, that death which took a holiday... Curtain!

Coming back from dinner, the bar-room boys are still at it, pouring out their hearts and souls and drinks, being sorry for their mothers and wives and shortcomings, worrying about their pasts and presents and futures, waiting, always waiting to hear from their Hickey.

And, in more words than James Barton can remember, their Hickey quite frequently obliges, telling them the long story of his life, his love—her name is Evelyn—and his present-day sobriety. And how he killed her because he loved her; how, now, he is insane. "Mad" is the word.

If there is more to this than meets the ear, it is not in me to find it. Not even with an extra hour's assessing.

* * *

Proud Production

Turning from Eugene O'Neill's play to The Theatre Guild's production, it delights me, after my own dinner and in my usual time, to report that "The Iceman Cometh" has been given more than its rightful opportunity to be the play it ought to be—but isn't.

Under the sympathetic direction of Eddie Dowling, in one of Robert Edmond Jones' most Eugene O'Neill-like settings, a hand-picked cast of gifted players is better than the playwright ordered. Especially Dudley Digges, Nicholas Joy, E. G. Marshall and Carl Benton Reid.

These, as a saloon keeper, a one-time captain, a one-time Harvard man and a one-time anarchist, are ably assisted by Russell Collins as a one-time correspondent, John Marriott as a one-time gambler, Tom Pedi as a one-time bartender and Ruth Gilbert as an all-time prostitute.

But even the best-acted scenes are persistently incapable of making an important play out of the scatterbrain episodes of which "The Iceman Cometh" is composed. By the time the fourth act and hour have come around, you feel like echoing Harry Hope's "Get it over, you long-winded—"

You don't of course. Instead, you remain until the last, long curtain, trying not to remember that, in the Book of Genesis, the story of the Creation is told in less than a thousand words, while "The Iceman Cometh" uses more than 80,000 to tell of the iceman's coming.

I can imagine why The Theatre Guild felt called upon to produce "The Iceman Cometh." But I can't imagine why Eugene O'Neill felt called upon to write it.

'THE ICEMAN COMETH.'

Play by Eugene O'Neill; directed by Eddie Dowling; production designed and lighted by Robert Edmond Jones; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; associate producer, Armina Marshall; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck, Wednesday evening, October 9, 1946. The cast:

Harry Hope	Dudley Digges
Ed Mosher	Morton L. Stevens
Pat McGloin	Al McGranery
Willie Oban	E. G. Marshall
Joe Mott	John Marriott
Piet Wetjoen	Frank Tweddell
Cecil Lewis	Nicholas Joy
James Cameron	Russell Collins
Hugo Kalmar	Leo Chalzel
Larry Slade	Carl Benton Reid
Rocky Pioggi	Tom Pedi
Dan Parritt	Paul Crabtree
Pearl	Ruth Gilbert
Margie	Jeanne Cagney
Cora	Marcella Markham
Chuck Morello	Joe Marr
Theodore Hickman	James E. Barton
Moran	Michael Wyler
Lieb	Charles Hart

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 10, 1946

O'Neill's 'Iceman' Here at Last

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Early in "The Iceman Cometh," Eugene O'Neill says, "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us." His play tells how fatal it is to strip man of his illusions about himself.

Mr. O'Neill clarifies his theme by applying it to a flophouse full of human dregs, men who have one dream left apiece. This vehicle for his discourse is compatible as the playwright has the greatest compassion for people's littleness and frailty.

Harry Hope never leaves his rundown hotel. He spends most of his time in the backroom of the bar with his decaying lodgers. For 20 years he has blamed his sodden apathy on the loss of his wife.

The Movement in 1912.

With him are Larry Slade, former anarchist (it is 1912), who wants only to lose his meaningless life, and Dan Parritt, son of a woman Larry has known in the Movement. Dan is pursued by some guilt connected with his mother's arrest for a bombing.

Willie Oban insists he is still a good lawyer; his career was ruined by his father's disgrace.

Two former national enemies, a Boer and an Englishman, will someday get together a little money and go home. Now they are wrangling cronies.

Jimmy Tomorrow is drinking away his wife's unfaithfulness, but he will go back to work in time.

Each of the others has a reason sufficient to himself for being there.

In Love with Street Walker.

One bartender, Chuck, has it in his mind to one day marry Cora, a street walker who lives in the house. And the other bartender, Rocky, takes the earnings of Pearl and Margie, also of Cora's trade. Rocky is a protector and the girls may be tarts, but any stronger description infuriates them.

The crowd is expecting Hickey, a salesman of standing, who periodically brightens their lives with the binges he spends at Harry's place. Hickey arives, but mystically reformed.

Methodically he sells them a peace he has found in recognizing and facing his own delusions. He needs no more drink. Stubbornly he preaches his gospel, prying at truth and urging each of the others to wake up from his pipe dream and act.

Gag of Wife and Iceman.

For the first time Hickey neglects his gag about leaving his wife with the iceman. The crowd wants to know what has changed him, and he admits his wife is dead.

Under his prodding they begin to stir from stupor, and in the process lose all their ease and friendship. Harry admits his wife was a nagging old hag, and walks gingerly down to the corner before fear drives him back.

Some of the others clean themselves up and make a start at going after the jobs they have talked about. Dan, who has fruitlessly begged Larry to hear him, blurts that he sold out his mother and the anarchists to police to get money for a girl.

Chuck and Cora go off to get married and Rocky is ready to face the truth of his income from the girls.

Begin to Hate Each Other.

Instead of easing their consciences or bringing them peace, the change makes them hate each other and then seems to take what life there is out of them.

In desperate disappointment, with the police waiting, Hickey tells them he has killed the adoring wife who kept alive his hope of reforming. It was the only way to end his dream without hurting her.

Hickey is ready for death. That was his peace. Dan is ready too. He admits that he caused his mother's imprisonment because he hated her, and kills himself.

The others begin to come to life when Hickey leaves. They decide he was insane, and suddenly the liquor they are drinking takes effect. They are their old worthless, comfortable, dreaming selves again.

Ready for Truth Near Death.

So it is the substance that is dreams which makes up life. Man is ready for truth when he is ready to die.

This long drama has been given splendid casting by the Guild. James Barton, faintly satanic looking, is simple and eager as the reformed Hickey, with one last dream to lose. Dudley Digges is expertly humorous as the proprietor, and Carl Benton Reid gives Larry tragic dignity.

Tom Pedi gets broad wit from the long part of Rocky, and Paul Crabtree skillfully sustains the growing tragedy of Dan. Russell Collins gives a rare portrait of a dipsomaniac, and Nicholas Joy makes a crisp British captain.

Pathetic Grandeur.

Mr. O'Neill has no peers in the art of stating big ideas in simple language for the theater. There is a pathetic grandeur about these low subjects of his as he helps them fight for a shred of nebulous dignity.

There may be those who feel that "The Iceman Cometh" could have made its point more sharply with fewer characters and words and in less time. They may well be right.

But Mr. O'Neill is no sketcher. He has chosen a canvas of heroic size for a universal idea. No other writer could fill it with such telling detail, or give this subtle argument such conviction.

PM

OCTOBER 11, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Eugene O'Neill After 12 Years

PM Reviews

When America's most celebrated dramatist offers his first play in a dozen years, he may well become the victim of the too high hopes he raises. But one can have gone to *The Iceman Cometh* with more reasonable expectations, and still have come away more than a little disappointed. Disappointment is relative, of course—as achievement is; and to say that I do not find *The Iceman* very impressive is not to imply that a great deal of it is not interesting, is not individual, is not expert, is not finely theatrical— or that in a theater where mere slickness is too quickly applauded and real seriousness is too seldom apparent, *The Iceman* is not worth having or seeing. It should be seen. One might well see it for the production alone, which is one of the best integrated in years, with many good performances and with sets by Robert Edmond Jones that are misleadingly simple but supremely right.

But *The Iceman* leaves me dissatisfied. The commonest objection that will be levied against it—its great length, its often static tone, its often repetitious incident—is not really the most crucial; or if it is, is only so in terms of theater rather than drama. The *Iceman* is much too long for what it says, but not necessarily for what it might have said. It deals, spaciously by intention, with a great many lives, most of them falling into one group, but three of them standing apart from it. All these need room. But though, in terms of theater, Mr. O'Neill has dealt fruitfully with all his people, in terms of drama he has not; and philosophically his play is more longwindedly explicit than it is in any way profound.

Mr. O'Neill has pictured a saloon full of drunken bums who hang on to life through the generosity of the proprietor, an old drunk himself. The boozers are of many kinds —a disillusioned anarchist, a Harvard Law School graduate, a Boer War Dutch general, a Boer War British captain, the former owner of a Negro gambling house, an old circus man; and for company, they have a pair of barkeeps and a trio of streetwalkers. The drunks are washed up and out-at-elbows, living only to cadge rotgut and quarrel more from habit than animus; but they are kept going by their "pipe dreams," their clouded illusions that tomorrow will change their luck or stiffen their characters.

Each year, on the proprietor's birthday, a traveling salesman named Hickey throws them a party, getting as drunk as they do. But this year when Hickey comes, he announces that though the party is on, he is out of it. Something has reformed him, he has found peace by facing reality, by discounting "tomorrow"; and he nags the others, who hate the idea and soon come to hate him, to pull themselves together and follow his example. They try, but they can't; they can't, and they are done for. But they have still to hear Hickey's own story, how he had killed the wife he loved because her forgiveness of all his transgressions bred an unbearable sense of guilt in him. Hence Hickey had resigned himself to death. The police lead him away, and the slobs go back to their drinking and their pipe dreams.

But Hickey the messenger and breath of death, has shaken two people: the old anarchist who had thought himself past illusions, and a newcomer, the young son of a woman anarchist who had squealed on her because, he finally confesses, he had hated her. He proceeds to commit suicide.

* * *

These are Mr. O'Neill's people.

and he treats them with compassionate affection. He pumps color and humanity into his sodden derelicts and his whores, he lets them talk and curse, snooze and squabble, perform their little tragicomic bits of vaudeville. They are not probed very deeply (we know almost as much about them in the first act as in the last) they do not grow, but they grow beautifully familiar and hence fairly real: the four hours of *The Iceman* have the cumulative value of a very long novel, where abundance does well enough what art would do much better.

Hickey, of course, is in different case. He is someone with whom Mr. O'Neill creates suspense and contrives development: with him abundance is no substitute for art, and with him O'Neill fails. He fails, first, by keeping Hickey mysterious for three acts for the plot's sake, and then letting him pour out his story far too articulately; Hickey explains himself with a textbook clarity that robs him of a truly *dramatic* role in the play, or a really human complexity. Mr. O'Neill, who marred *Mourning Becomes Electra* by spreading Freud right over the surface of it like so much peanut butter, has done something like the same thing, with Hickey's explicit self-knowledge here.

But Hickey also comes off the shadowy figure usually produced when the symbolic side of a character precedes the organic side in an author's imagination. Neither as an enigma nor as a belated and extensive autobiographer does Hickey come off as a dramatic figure. Only theatrically does he have his uses.

* * *

As for Mr. O'Neill's "thesis," it would seem to be that men cannot live without illusions; hardly a new or very disputable idea. One would be less inclined to treat it with levity, however, had Mr. O'Neill let it seep into the story rather than build up four long acts to wave it like a flag at the end. Or, better still, had he given it (however truistic it was in itself) enough of what used to be called poetic truth; had he made it operate persuasively enough inside the play's own context, so that it shed new illumination, so that it provided a genuine experience. But a genuine experience is just what I failed to get from *The Iceman Cometh*. For all its fine scattered scenes of theater, it left me cold.

I haven't space to do justice to all the acting in *The Iceman*. Dudley Digges, as the old saloon-keeper, turns in another of his fine and expert performances, and James Barton, as Hickey, turns in a competent one. One must single out, too, Carl Benton Reid and Tom Pedi; and Paul Crabtree, John Marriott and Ruth Gilbert. And Mr. Dowling's direction.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York Post

OCTOBER 10, 1946

Eugene O'Neill's New Play Is Powerful and Moving

By Richard Watts Jr.

Eugene O'Neill's first play in twelve years is, among many other things, certain to be the most controversial dramatic event of the season, with sides taken violently and the admiration and damnation rising to great heights. Since the battle lines are no doubt being drawn at the moment, I shall get into the fray at once by expressing my dogmatic conviction that "The Iceman Cometh" is a superb drama of splendid and imposing stature, which is at once powerful, moving, beautiful, eloquent and compassionate.

Being a playwright of monumental proportions, Mr. O'Neill gives us works in which both the virtues and flaws are on an impressive scale, and there is no denying that "The Iceman Cometh" has its share of the latter. There is a wild, cascading power in O'Neill dramas, which, if tamed, would destroy the freedom and scope of his fierce and brooding imagination, and the excessive length, the sometimes unnecessary verbiage and the deceptively leisured interludes of an O'Neill play are a small price to pay for keeping his essential quality intact. Editing might make "The Iceman" seem more efficient, but it would endanger the magnitude of its spirit.

Superficially, it would be possible to describe "The Iceman Cometh" by comparing it to an alliance between Saroyan and Gorky, the Saroyan of "The Time of Your Life" and the Gorky of "The Lower Depth." The Saroyan aspect would lie in the warm, almost tender attitude toward the boozy philosophizing of alcoholics. The Gorky contribution, which is less superficial, would have to do with the setting, which is a refuge for derelicts, and the central character, who is a rather mysterious visitor with ideas of bringing peace and comfort to lost souls. Such comparisons, while they come almost inescapably to mind, are certainly not to be pushed far, since O'Neill uses his material for very different purposes.

Concerning Drink

One charge certain to be brought against the play is that it is immoral. The indictment will not deal with such minor matters as the frequent frankness of the dialogue or the presence of prostitutes in the cast of characters. It will be based on the no doubt shameless fact that "The Iceman" seems to be an eloquent and persuasive defense of getting drunk. There is no getting around it: the poor derelicts of the drama have a very satisfactory time with their dreams when they are filled with poisonous five-cent whisky, and they are terribly miserable when they are approximately sober.

It happens, however, that drink, while important to both the play and the characters, is not the vital thing in what O'Neill has to say. He is merely proclaiming the humanitarian doctrine that mankind, being lost and lonely in a hard and bitter world, is entitled to some sort of illusion to comfort it in exile, even if that illusion can be supplied only by alcohol, and that the best intentioned meddler interferes with this right at his own peril.

Symbolism

Whenever there is a new O'Neill play there is a lot of talk, some of it rhapsodic but most of it contemptuous, about symbolism and messages and cryptic profundities. In part O'Neill, himself, is to blame for such talk, since his scorn for the conventional in his drama and his often ponderous brooding on the universe do a great deal to encourage it. In truth, though, most of his works are essentially simple, just as in the case of "The Iceman." The new play, whatever any one may say of it, is not heavily symbolic. It has a lot to say about miserable humanity, but says it in story, not symbols.

What seems to me important about the drama is that its barroom characters, who had once been soldiers, anarchists, newspapermen, gamblers, lawyers, policemen and circus men, are richly, humorously, compassionately and knowingly drawn, and that their talk, their history and their entanglement in the tragedies of a hardware salesman, who would play providence to them, and a boy, who comes to an old anarchist for help, are movingly, if often too languorously, dramatized.

Brooding Spent

Of course, "The Iceman Cometh" is far more than that, too. "Compassion" is a word that can hardly be avoided in the consideration of an O'Neill play, and it is present in its most eloquent form here. The seeking of inner meaning in such a work has at least the justification that the brooding spirit, the melancholy contemplation of man and his fate, the frank contemplation of human defeat and despair and the manner in which such despair is even given a certain nobility, which are all present in "The Iceman Cometh," give the simple story of men reduced to simplicity its stature and strange beauty.

This remarkable drama, which on the first night ran from 4:30 to 10 p. m.—with an hour and a quarter dinner intermission—presents great problems of production and casting. On the whole, they have been handsomely surmounted. Robert Edmond Jones' barroom sets are brilliant, the cast is mostly splendid and Eddie Dowling's direction is characteristically sympathetic and understanding. There are a number of extremely fine performances and at least one is superb. The veteran Dudley Digges is nothing short of magnificent as the sentimental old proprietor of the derelict's saloon.

Barton's Role

The most difficult role in the drama, that of the hardware salesman, is played by James Barton, whose acting problems include a moving and dramatic speech which lasts some fifteen minutes. Mr. Barton is an excellent and experienced player, and, on the whole, he is quite brilliant. It is no doubt unfair to him, but somehow I could not help thinking that Mr. Dowling, himself, would have been far more touching and impressive in the role.

There are some fine portrayals in the lesser roles. In fact, all of the barroom denizens, male and female, are admirably presented and it is fairly arbitrary to pick out a few of the names for special mention. But I recall particularly Paul Crabtree's understanding impersonation of the doomed son of a celebrated anarchist heroine; E. G. Marshall's Harvard Law School alumnus, John Marriott's Negro ex-gambler, Russel Collins' one-time Boer War Correspondent, Tom Pedi's bartender and Nicholas Joy's broken down British ex-officer.

Then, too, there should be special mention of Carl Benton Reid, who plays the important role of a despairing ex-anarchist, and gives it a fine air of broken-down intellectual integrity.

"The Iceman Cometh" goes about its story-telling too slowly and at too great length and it has its share of other faults, too. But it is a drama that gives the entire American theatre dignity and importance.

"The Iceman Cometh"—*continued*

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

OCTOBER 10, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

O'Neill—at Long Last

EUGENE O'Neill's erratic genius flames uncertainly in "The Iceman Cometh." Breaking a silence of a dozen years, he has peopled the stage of the Martin Beck with fascinating characters, has involved them in a magnificent riddle of life and death, and then has left them and an audience singularly untouched. It is a long play, starting in late afternoon and pausing for the dinner hour. During four acts the celebrated dramatist stirs the bitter dregs of human experience in a waterfront saloon of 1912. With a reverent Theater Guild production and generally inspired acting, the play has a savage undertow and moments of bleak and tragic majesty. That it remains essentially earthbound and monotonous is a flaw inherent in the work.

* * *

The more vivid and individual the gallery of bums becomes in "The Iceman Cometh," the greater is the compulsion for some dynamic resolution of their various whip-sawings by destiny. Most of the figures are content in their palace of pipe dreams, drinking the proprietor's 15-cent rotgut and kidding each other malevolently. O'Neill has drawn them masterfully, from Harry Hope, the irascible host, to the ex-wobbly, Larry, who likes to think he has taken a philosopher's grandstand seat at this pageant of the lower depths. What he has failed to do, as Dostoievsky did, is to shape their personal tragedies to an upheaval which might illuminate their existence.

* * *

The dramatic catharsis in "The Iceman Cometh" is mystical and mystifying. It occurs when a hardware drummer\[1\] whose arrival has been eagerly awaited by the derelicts, turns a brawling birthday party for Harry into a wake. Hickey, as he is known, should have been the life of the festivities, joshing the old anarchist, the broken-down British officer, the tarts and the touchy Negro and telling his old gag about his wife and the iceman. Instead, he announces that he has found peace by denying his particular pipe dream and lures each pitiful human wreck into attempting the same experiment. It is a striking and even sensational plot twist, but it is coiled tight and then allowed to unravel in a disappointing climax.

* * *

One may select a variety of interpretations for this major theme. In terms of overt stage exposition, it finds the bums in Harry's dump taking on the horrible guises of death itself until Hickey confesses that he has killed his loving and beloved wife and takes sanction in insanity by damning her. There are profundities aplenty in the last two acts of "The Iceman Cometh," particularly since there is a sub-plot in which the son of Larry's former mistress in the I. W. W. confesses he has turned her in for a life stretch and tries to atone for his sin by committing suicide. The stuff of a great and moving tragedy gleams through scene after scene of the drama, but it has not been properly refined.

* * *

The performances do not fall whatever it is that O'Neill has sought to communicate in stage terms. Dudley Digges is superbly crotchety as the sinner among sinners, who cherishes the bums he shelters and grieves sentimentally for a nagging wife. His Harry is a full-dimensioned and understandable Irishman no matter how murky the action becomes. James Barton has the difficult assignment of making Hickey a recognizable and vaguely appealing figure. For much of the time he is excellent, but he plays the final stanzas with less knowledge than rather bewildered intensity. Carl Benton Reid is fine as the philosopher who likes to think he has forsaken his cause and Nicholas Joy is seedily jaunty as the Boer War veteran.

* * *

Several of the lesser parts, being remote from O'Neill's restless probing into the human spirit, stand out with astonishing clarity. Morton L. Stevens is slyly amusing as a circus grifter, Leo Chalzel is excellent as a sodden old Anarchist; Dan Parritt makes the visiting boy peculiarly obnoxious and Marcella Markham, Jeanne Cagney and Ruth Gilbert are immense as tarts who insist on being called just that. Then there are Russell Collins, as an ex-foreign correspondent who really likes to drink, and Tom Pedi, who is excellent as a bartender. Eddie Dowling has kept all the characters alive and vibrant in his staging against Robert Edmond Jones's realistic setting. Neither of them can keep "The Iceman Cometh" from conversational monotony and final dramatic confusion.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 10, 1946

'Iceman Cometh,' Mr. O'Neill's New Work, With Four-Hour Running Time, Has Its World Premiere at the Martin Beck

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Mr. O'Neill has written one of his best plays. Dipping back in his memory thirty-four years, reaching down to the tatter-demalions of a mouldy bar-room, he has come up with a dark and somber play that compares with the best work of his earliest period. "The Iceman Cometh," he calls it to no one's satisfaction but his own, and it was acted with rare insight and vitality at the Martin Beck last evening. Writing it for a performance that lasts more than four hours is a sin that rests between Mr. O'Neill and his Maker. Long plays have become nothing more than a bad label with our first dramatist.

But if that is the way Mr. O'Neill wants to afflict harmless playgoers, let us accept our fate with nothing more than a polite demurer. For the only thing that matters is that he has plunged again into the black quagmire of man's illusions and composed a rigadoon of death as strange and elemental as his first works. Taking his characters again out of the lower depths, as he did in the "S. S. Glencairn" series, he is looking them over with bleak and mature introspection. And like all his best work, this one is preeminently actable. The Theatre Guild performance, under Eddie Dowling's direction, is a masterpiece of tones, rhythms and illumination.

* * *

The whisky-ridden derelicts who drag their broken carcasses through Harry Hope's bar came out of O'Neill's youth when he, too, was drinking too much and dreaming of becoming a writer. They are men whose only lives are illusions—"pie dreams," O'Neill calls their memories which they foolishly translate into hopes for a future that will never exist. When the play opens they are happily living together in a spirit of human rancor, broken, tired and drunken but buoyed up by romantic illusions about themselves.

What shatters their stupor is the arrival of an old comrade who has reformed. He has found peace at last, he says. He does not need whisky any more, he says, because he has purged himself of illusions and knows the full truth of himself. Instead of making them happy, however, his reform movement destroys their decaying contentment. Without illusions, they find themselves standing alone and terrified. They cannot face the hollowness of themselves without the opium of illusions. But they are released in the last act by the awful discovery that their teacher has freed himself from illusions by committing a crime that will sit him in the electric chair. He is free from illusions because he has resigned from life and is already dead in spirit. Whereupon, the derelicts drink up again and happily relapse into the stupor of the bottle.

* * *

That is the abstract story of "The Iceman Cometh." But the concrete drama on the stage is infinitely more flavorsome. Among its battered wretches it includes a raffish lot of social outcasts in amazing variety—an I. W. W. émigré, a broken gambler, a cop who was thrown off the force, a British infantry officer who stole regimental funds, a Boer commando leader who showed the white feather, the well-educated son of an embezzler, some prostitutes and barkeeps. The Lord knows they talk too much, for Mr. O'Neill insists on grinding their bitterness into very small and precise pieces. But it is good talk—racy, angry, comic drumbeats on the lid of doom, and a strong undercurrent of elemental drama silently washes the gloomy charnel-house where they sit waiting.

Surely it is no accident that most of Mr. O'Neill's plays act well. Although he seems on the surface to be a literal writer, interminably fussing over minor details, his best plays move across the stage as methodically and resolutely as a heavy battle attack, and over-run strategic points with a kind of lumbering precision. The performance of "The Iceman Cometh" ranks among the theatre's finest works. To house these rags and tags of the human race, Robert Edmond Jones has created a mean and dingy last refuge that nevertheless glows with an articulate meaning, like a Daumier print, as one alert spectator observed.

To anyone who loves acting, Dudley Digges' performance as the tottering and irascible saloon proprietor is worth particular cherishing. Although the old man is half dead, Mr. Digges' command of the actor's art of expressing character and theme is brilliantly alive; it overflows with comic and philosophical expression. As the messenger of peace, James Barton is also superb — common, unctuous, cheerful and fanatical; and Mr. Barton reads one of the longest speeches on record without letting it drift off into sing-song or monotony.

* * *

As the barroom's master of cosmic thinking, Carl Benton Reid is vigorously incisive, and lends substance to the entire performance. Nicholas Joy is giving the best performance of his career as the unfrocked captain. As the garrulous night bartender, Tom Pedi with his querulous vitality streaks an amusing ribbon of color throughout the drama. There are also notable performances by John Marriott, as the discredited gambler; Paul Crabtree, as an I. W. W. traitor, and E. G. Marshall, as a fallen Harvard man.

If there were any justice in the world, all the actors would get a line of applause here. But this bulletin, like Mr. O'Neill's play, is already much too garrulous. Let us cut it short with one final salute to a notable drama by a man who writes with the heart and wonder of a poet.

The Sun

OCTOBER 10, 1946

'The Iceman Cometh' Is Powerful Theater, Superbly Played at the Martin Beck.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Eugene O'Neill, first dramatist of our time, returns to the New York stage after a twelve-year absence with a four-hour play, "The Iceman Cometh," which has compassion, excitement and violence. It was presented last night at the Martin Beck by the Theater Guild.

"The Iceman Cometh" is stark and disturbing. It is packed with snarling and brutal speech. The characters are vivid and there is a vast richness of dialogue. And, frequently, far too much dialogue, for the play is often too slow, too long-winded. But certainly these are minor defects to be more or less expected in a play of its size.

An evening packed with powerful theater is provided as O'Neill goes along to make the point that every man is entitled to his pipe dreams and that any one disrupting them is up to no good in the world.

In writing of the lives of bums and misfits and outcasts of a bygone day—of such people as he knew in his early wanderings—O'Neill creates a loathsome character in the self-tortured murderer whose name is Hickman—"Hickey" to his friends—and who brings death along with him. The role places a severe task upon the actor assigned to it. James Barton is no more than partially successful in his projection of it. The part calls for a more engaging and more whimsical player. But the others of the cast are magnificent.

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O'Neill's locale for "The Iceman Cometh" is a cheap West Side bar, downtown Manhattan, in the year of 1912—a sanctuary for a weird collection of soaks, has-beens, tarts and half-dead bums, a profane and pipe-dreaming lot given to continual drunkenness and occasional self-pity. There, in Harry Hope's foul but hospitable lair, these members-in-good-standing of a pitiful family circle, waiting soddenly for the end, sleep off their jags, enjoy their alcoholic deliriums, dream their dreams and prolong their escape from reality.

Harry Hope, the proprietor, hasn't been out in the street for twenty years. He's a half-soused ex-Tammanyite who weeps for his dead wife as he stays in a semi-stupor. The habitues of his rooming house and graveyard of a bar are men like himself, and they are his friends. There is Larry, the sardonic philosopher and one-time anarchist, who is forever talking of the Big Sleep. There is Ed, erstwhile circus con man. There is burly Pat McGloin, former police lieutenant, who was kicked off the force. And there are such fellow inebriates as Willie Oban, who studied law at Harvard; Hugo, once an editor of anarchist publications; Joe Mott, formerly proprietor of a gambling house; the General and the Captain, foes in the Boer War, and Jimmy Tomorrow, one-time correspondent in that war.

Also, the frowsy street walkers, Pearl and Margie and Cora, and an outsider, a youth named Parritt, whose mother is in jail in the West.

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They're all there, this profane, unregenerate lot, dreaming out their lives in Harry Hope's haven for the half dead, a place that's home, even though it smells of rot-gut. They're there with their boozy meditations, their oaths and their cravings, their mumblings about tomorrow and their occasional belligerence, and their talk of the fabulous "Hickey"—"Hickey," the hardware salesman, the spieler, the fast talker, the heavy drinker, the big spender with the roll that would choke a horse; "Hickey," the drink-buying drummer who goes on periodicals and who is always cracking the joke about his wife being home in the hay with the iceman.

"Hickey" arrives. He shows up just in time to take charge of a birthday party for Harry Hope, but he's not the "Hickey" that they've known so well. He's now dead sober, off the stuff and selling a line of salvation. The party, therefore, becomes something of a wake. "Hickey" cajoles them all for not being honest with themselves, he angers and frightens them with the charge that they haven't the guts to face the truth, and bewilders them with his promise of peace and contentment. "Hickey," who has brought the touch of death with him, goes after them one by one, and puts a reform wave into effect.

The bums begin sobering up, shaving and brushing up as they decide to face life. One by one, with new resolves and false jauntiness, they turn in their keys and set forth in quest of employment. Joe, the Negro, wants a crap game, a bank roll and another gambling house of his own. Willie Oban has decided to call at the D. A.'s office. The Captain will see a friend at the Consulate. The General, who once lifted a loaded South African oxcart by the axle, is willing to take manual labor. Ed Mosher is going to look up his old circus boss. Willie Tomorrow, the most jittery of them all, wants a new start. Pat McGloin has decided to get back on the force. And Harry Hope, dressed in his black suit, his Sunday best, and making a heroic effort, stumbles through the swinging doors—one of the unforgettable moments of the play—to take that walk around his ward, something he has been promising himself for twenty years. But he's back in a hurry. There were automobiles on the streets in 1912 and he has the delusion that he was almost hit by one of them.

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They all come back. They slink back, one by one, and reach for the bottle, but the stuff no longer has a kick. They can't pass out. They sit around stiffly, dejectedly, bewilderedly, some of them in ghostly pallor. It is then that "Hickey," returning to find them only half dead, goes into his confession—he murdered his wife to end the suffering that he has brought upon her. He shot her as she slept and he has summoned the police, now grimly standing by. "Hickey," handcuffed, is led away, with only two of the lot—the boy Parritt and old Larry—as his converts to death. But "Hickey's" departure gives the others release. The stuff in the bottle tastes good again. And they're back to it—and to their pipe dreams.

That's the story of "The Iceman Cometh." It's apparent that Eugene O'Neill has a liking for these derelicts of Harry Hope's saloon. It seems to be his reasoning that there's a place in the world for these fellows, that they do harm to nobody, that there's nothing vicious about them and that they're better off being left alone—and to their dreaming.

The playing of "The Iceman Cometh"—and an extraordinarily fine company it is—was marred midway in the final act last night when James Barton, in the course of his harrowing fifteen-minute speech, suffered an unfortunate lapse of memory. The audience shuddered as he stopped dead still and sought assistance from the prompter. He recovered bravely and was given an ovation as he made his exit.

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Dudley Digges gives one of the distinguished performances of his career as Harry Hope, haggard, numbed and besotted. Carl Benton Reid is fine as Larry, who prefers sitting in the grand stand of life to actual participation. Paul Crabtree turns in a vivid performance as the kid from the West who sold out on his anarchist gang and who dies a suicide in a leap from the fire escape. There is great life in Tom Pedi, the wop bartender, who is a pimp in his odd moments.

Nicholas Joy makes a genuine character of the one-time captain of British infantry, as does Frank Tweddell with that of a Boer general, now reduced to the status of a back-room bum. There are good performances from Morton L. Stevens, Al McGranary, Joe Marr, E. G. Marshall, John Marriott, Leo Chalzel and Russell Collins, always to be depended upon to do a lot with a line, a scene, a characterization. And there are the gaudy ladies of the evening, Pearl and Margie and Cora, girls who good-humoredly admit that they're tarts but who won't stand for being called whores. Ruth Gilbert, Jeanne Cagney and Marcella Markham are excellent in these roles—particularly Miss Gilbert, who makes Pearl quite good fun.

Robert Edmond Jones, an O'Neill associate in the early, uncertain years, has provided two realistic settings, authentic in all details, and Eddie Dowling has contributed a masterful job of stage direction. He would have been the ideal actor, I feel, for the role of the salesman, Hickey, who came along selling death.

"The Iceman Cometh," for all its long-windedness, has power and intensity. If not O'Neill's finest play, it is certainly one of stature and importance. The Theater Guild has performed a public service in bringing it to the stage and in bringing him back to combat duty.

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DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 10, 1946

Eugene O'Neill's 'Iceman Cometh' Great Drama, Wonderfully Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh" is a magnificent drama—magnificent in plan, in size, in scope, in depth. It is a frightening play, too—terrifying and shocking; and its performance by an inspired company is superb. Afternoons and evenings from now on at the Martin Beck may be seen American theatre as it should be—a powerful and moving thing, a part of life itself. A great dramatist has cut the ordinary commercial stage down to its tiny real size.

I had a feeling yesterday afternoon and last evening that some of my neighbors at the Theatre Guild's premiere were so busy looking for symbolism, so intent upon finding hidden meanings, so afraid they might miss the master's message and risk being considered obtuse, that they had little time left for doing the very simple thing and the only thing an audience is supposed to do—to sit in a comfortable chair and take in a play.

O'Neill doesn't need any audience help to tell his story, for he is a craftsman who knows that it is his job to tell it, through his actors. It is our pipe-dreams which make us live, and when the last dream is gone there is nothing but death ahead—and Death is the Iceman of the drama. It's as simple as that.

From his own raffish past O'Neill has summoned the ghosts of the bums he knew; has bid them come alive again, from their tattered souls outward to their frayed and dirty clothing. One by one he brings them to life, hiding nothing. But in the seeming pitilessness of this exposure there is the profound pity of complete understanding.

The Bums of 1912.

He has brought these bums together as they were in 1912, putting them in the back room of a West Side saloon—some say it is Jimmy the Priest's place—where rotgut whisky is a nickel and pipe-dreams are free.

Here they sprawl on the iron chairs or sleep with their heads on the grubby tables. Here they cadge drinks from the proprietor, Harry Hope, who is a bum himself. Night and day make little difference to them, for the light doesn't change much in this grimy place and liquor can be had at any time—for this is a Raines Law hotel where guests may be served at any hour.

Harry Hope is a crotchety but warm-hearted Irishman who hasn't set foot on the street in 20 years; hasn't left the place since his wife died. His own pipe-dream is that some time he is going to walk out of there, see all his friends in the ward and run for the post of alderman which was offered him two decades ago.

Among his guests:

A former circus man, a short-change expert who yearns for the circus days;

A former police lieutenant, fired off the force for graft, who regards himself as the fall guy for higher-ups and is sure his name can be cleared;

A former Harvard law student whom a family disgrace drove to drink;

A Negro, one-time operator of a gambling joint under the protection of Big Bill Devery;

A Boer, one-time general in the Boer War;

His friend and enemy, a captain of British infantry, now a remittance man;

A former newspaper and publicity man, who is always going to straighten out and clean up tomorrow and get his job back;

An Anarchist editor and philosopher, now crazy;

A former Anarchist who believes he sees all, knows all and is watching the passing parade with detachment;

A boy on the lam from some Anarchist trouble in California,

And two bartenders, one of whom has two street walkers bringing him in side money and the other of whom has one, whom he loves and some times wants to marry.

All Wait for Hickey.

They are, as O'Neill has drawn them and as a wonderful company plays them, a shattering picture of hope and despair—and they are far from lugubrious. Their squabbles and opinions provide some splendid humor—splendid because it derives from character and situation.

It takes the afternoon session of the play—a little over an hour—to set all these characters in their vivid reality, and to let us watch them as they wait for the arrival of Hickey. Hickey—Theodore Hickman—is a hardware salesman who comes to Harry Hope's this time each year for a big drunk because it is Hope's birthday.

This time it isn't the old, joking, happy Hickey who arrives with his stories about how his wife has been entertaining the iceman. He is pleasant enough, but he is sober, and he has come with a purpose. He is an evangelist, come to show the others the light. He has found happiness and he wants his friends to share it.

The happiness is the loss of his last remaining pipe-dream. With this gone he knows that nothing remains ahead: there are no more tomorrows and therefore he is at peace. With his cheerful salesman's approach he nags the bums, one by one, into laying the ghosts of all their tomorrows. Harry Hope must really go out and tour his ward; Jimmy Tomorrow must get his publicity job; Willie Oban must get a law practice or a job in the D. A.'s office, and so on.

Hickey knows they'll never make it, and tells them so. They will come back, beaten, and then their tomorrows will all be gone and they will live happily ever after.

Pipe-Dreams Return.

But it doesn't work out that way. Hickey transforms a group of amiable souses into a pack of snarling enemies. The peace he promised—a peace that comes with the knowledge that only death lies ahead—fails to materialize. Harry Hope's birthday party is a pathetic wake. Only at the last, when they learn that Hickey is insane, does the fine life return. All but two of them get their pipe-dreams back and the whisky tastes good once more. The two who fail, die.

I have never before seen so many exciting performances in one play. As Harry Hope, Dudley Digges is magnificent. As Hickey, James Barton gallantly carries a tremendous role, with a last-act scene in which he confesses the murder of his wife—to put her out of her misery for loving such a bum as himself—which is almost staggering in its demands. As the sideline philosopher, Carl Benton Reid is perfect.

Ruth Gilbert, Jeanne Cagney and Marcella Markham, as the street-walkers, are funny and pathetic in turn as they tell themselves they are not whores—just tarts. Rocky Pioggi is a joy as the night bartender—and so is every last member of the company a joy.

The direction is by Eddie Dowling, and it is another triumph for one of the finest workmen in the theatre. The setting, by Robert Edmond Jones, is precisely right. "The Iceman Cometh" is great theatre.

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"Cyrano de Bergerac"

The Sun

OCTOBER 9, 1946

'Cyrano de Bergerac' in Spirited Production —Jose Ferrer Hearty as Rostand's Hero.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

That gallant and beautiful play, "Cyrano de Bergerac," was restored to the New York stage last night—returned to us via a smooth, intelligent and pictorial production at the Alvin, and with Jose Ferrer in the role that has been a challenge to actors for the past half century.

"Can Ferrer play the Rostand hero?" is a question Broadway has been asking itself all season. Well, we now have the answer. He can play it, he does play it. Lacking robustness, not an actor of heroic size and not particularly swaggering in his interpretation, he is nevertheless a hearty poet and braggart, a fire-eating duellist, a heroic Gascon given to verse and to self-sacrifice. It is a stimulating and alert performance that he turns in. He reads with clarity; he is very nimble, and is at his best in his moments of comedy.

The Brian Hooker version of the Rostand play, which served Walter Hampden so well, is used in the Ferrer production, brought to town after many weeks of patient and painstaking work. The production has pace, flow and mobility, the settings and costumes of Lemuel Ayers are first-rate, and the company, if somewhat spotty, is generally competent.

This new presentation of the 50-year-old poetic drama brings back to the local stage the fiery Cyrano's duel to the accompaniment of his feat of verse-making; the wooing in the darkness, with the lyrical hero speaking for the mute Christian, and with Roxane enthralled upon the balcony above; the tumult of the siege of Arras, and the lingering death of the poet of the fantastic nose in the final scene in the convent . . . all ingredients of a time-tested love story that has held its place in the theater throughout the drama's changing years.

Numerous actresses have undertaken the role of Roxane, who never loved but one man in her life and who lost him—twice. It has fallen to Bernhardt, to Ada Rehan, to Margaret Anglin, to Carroll McComas, and now Frances Reid comes forth as the virginal heroine, and she is quite lovely in the part. Ralph Clanton is impressive as the thundering, plotting and arrogant Comte De Guiche. Paula Laurence makes a real person of the skimpy character of the Duenna. Hiram Sherman is an amusing Ragueneau, the pastry king. Ernest Graves seems to be the right man for the handsome and inarticulate Christian.

Melchor G. Ferrer's staging (with probably an assist or two from Jose and perhaps a suggestion or two from Guthrie McClintic) keeps the play alive for most of the way—its lesser moments come along when Cyrano is silent and unseen—and Paul Bowles has again contributed incidental music that is properly in the mood of the proceedings.

"Cyrano de Bergerac" was Cyrano's play when Mansfield did it and as Hampden did it; and it still is as Jose Ferrer offers it today. He is moving along as an actor. There are numerous roles, such as King Lear and Peer Gynt and Richard III, that will probably tempt him in seasons to come.

Let us now be content with this spirited new "Cyrano de Bergerac." It has greatly enriched a laggard season. It is fine theater.

'CYRANO DE BERGERAC.'

Play by Edmond Rostand; version by Brian Hooker; staged by Melchor G. Ferrer; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; incidental music by Paul Bowles; production under the supervision of Arthur S. Friend; presented by by Jose Ferrer at the Alvin Theater, Tuesday evening, October 8, 1946.

THE CAST:

Parisr	Bradford MacQuarrie
Cavalier	Samuel N. Kirkham
Montfleury	George Oliver
Lackey	Stewart Lenz
Guardsman	Charles Summers
Flower Girl	Phyllis Hill
Citizen	Wallace Widdecombe
His Son	Walter Kelly
Col Carbon	Nick Dennis
Orange Girl	Patricia Wheel
Marquis	John O'Connor
Brissaille	Bert Whitley
Ligniere	Robert Carroll
Christian	Ernest Graves
Ragueneau	Hiram Sherman
Le Bret	William Woodson
Renaud	Frances Reid
Duenna	Paula Laurence
De Guiche	Ralph Clanton
De Valvert	Anthony Jordan
Montfleury	Leopold Badia
Cyrano	Jose Ferrer
Bellerose	Howard Wierum
Judicel	Robinson Stone
Meddler	Francis Lelion
Soubrette	Mary Jane Kersey
Comedienne	Jacqueline Evans
Lise	Nan McFarland
De Castel-Jaloux	Francis Compton
Poet	Vincent Donahue
Capuchin	Robinson Stone
Cadet	Paul Wilson
Marthe	Jacqueline Evans
Marguerite	Nan McFarland
Claire	Phyllis Hill

Journal American

OCTOBER 9, 1946

Jose Ferrer Offers 'Cyrano' at the Alvin

By ROBERT GARLAND

When a great play meets a great performance, that's good news on Broadway. Last night, at the Alvin, a great play met a great performance. The play was Edmond Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac" The performance was that of Jose Ferrer in the title role.

And the good news is that the great theatrical get-together was received with real acclaim by a first-night audience that remained long after the final curtain to register its appreciation. It was great stuff, all right; great for the theatre.

This new season being what it hasn't been, let's continue with revivals. Up to here and now, it's been "Hidden Horizon" against "The Front Page"; "The Bees and the Flowers" against "The Fortune Teller"; "Hear That Trumpet" against "Cyrano de Bergerac."

And, as there's no need to remind you, "The Front Page", "The Fortune Teller" (or what's still left of it in "Gypsy Lady") and "Cyrano de Bergerac" have shown themselves theatrically superior to their young and impotent on-stage competitors.

Especially "Cyrano". Only a few hours ago, in the tried and true Brian Hooker adaptation, with the settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers, incidental music by Paul Bowles and over-all supervision by Arthur Friend, it was a thing to see, give in to, to enjoy.

• • •

Always Cyrano

Give in you must, for Edmond Rostand's heroic comedy ignores the hectic tempo of these times. In five acts, the corresponding scenes range from the France of 1640 to the France of 1655, from the Hotel de Bourgogne to the Convent of the Ladies of the Cross.

As Clayton Hamilton points out in his preface to the standard American edition of the play, "Cyrano" was written in the brave days when the world was not yet out of joint, in a year a-kindle with great gestures, the period of the Spanish-American war.

First produced in Paris, at the Theatre de la Porte Saint-Martin in the Christmas season of 1897, it swiftly took the theatre of the world by storm. No other play in history, Mr. Hamilton is sure, ever attained a popular success so instantaneous and so enormous.

Believe it or not, the first "Cyrano de Bergerac" I ever saw was in comic opera form, with a Cyrano by Francis Wilson, a Roxane by Lulu Glaser and some music by Victor Herbert. Don't ask me where, or when! Then Richard Mansfield. Then Coquelin, to Bernhardt's Roxane.

Then Charles Richman to Ada Rehan's, Frank Gilmore to Percy Haswell's, and Walter Hampden to the Roxane of Carroll McComas, Marie Adels, Ingeborg Torrup and Katharine Warren. Using borrowed information, Mr. Hampden was a better Cyrano than anyone expected.

• • •

Rare Roxane

Not so Jose Ferrer at the Alvin. Everybody expected the erstwhile Lord Babberley of "Charley's Aunt", the Jerry Walker of "Let's Face It", the Iago of "Othello" and, out on the citronella circuit, the Leo of "Design For Living", to be superlative.

He is, too, bringing the part to life with an amazing mixture of sincerity and bravado. After years of thought, months of study and weeks of playing, his most eloquent of great lovers is great and most eloquent in deed and word. He, too, walks on and is Cyrano.

His surrounding players are also in the true Rostand tradition. Frances Reid is a rare Roxane, the best I've seen. Paula Laurence is her decorative Duenna. Hiram Sherman, Ralph Clanton, Francis Compton and Ernest Graves stay in the piece's frame.

In the interest of reporting, the entire production at the Alvin is worthy of "the magic text" of this "entrancing play." Merely to have reproduced it nowadays is sheer good fortune for the theatre. To have reproduced it so glowingly, is my good news for today.

So, back where we started, a great play meets a great performance in the Jose Ferrer revival of the Edmond Rostand "Cyrano de Bergerac" in the fine translation of Brian Hooker. Truly, there's no business like show business, now that it can again hold up its head.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 9, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Stunning

AN ENCHANTING revival of "Cyrano de Bergerac" has come to town. It required courage for Jose Ferrer to produce and star in the Rostand drama which Walter Hampden made so much his own in our time. He has met the challenge with great sense and artistry at the Alvin. In his hands the classic has been infused with excitement and eloquence. The scenes of the swashbuckling romantic tapestry are instinct with proud and fervid action. The poetry of Brian Hooker's translation is delivered in cadenced rhythms which are close to irresistible. This is a very fine "Cyrano de Bererac" of Jose Ferrer's and a show to gladden the season.

In the title role he controls the whole production much as a conductor-soloist defines the performance of a concerto. His portrait of the ill-favored poet whose hideous nose forces him to make love to Roxanne through another is a singular mixture of scornful arrogance and touching humility. He is superb as he composes a ballad to accompany a duel ending the refrain with a final sword thrust. His heckling of the Compte de Guiche, as he relates various ways of reaching the moon while his loved one is being married to Christian is a capital bit of classical comedy, and his declaration of devotion in the balcony scene is wonderfully moving. He has made the offering very much his own, but he has wisely given it a rich extension of acting and decor.

Ferrer has surrounded Cyrano with a goodly company on Fifty-second Street. Frances Reid is attractive and appealing as the understandably bewildered lady who loves the soul of one in the body of another. Her scenes with the star and with Ernest Graves, who is excellent as the brave and inarticulate Christian, are carried off in the grand manner. Ralph Clanton is a handsome and menacing figure as the Compte de Guiche and Hiram Sherman brings some lusty clowning to the part of the baker Rageneau, the friend of poets who tries to write recipes in rhyme. Francis Compton contributes a solid bit as the captain of the Gascons and William Woodson is helpful as Le Bret.

Excellent as his assistance may be, the star is the focal point of the proceedings, right through to the brilliantly under-played death scene of the final act. There are times when the stage becomes a bit top-heavy with costumes and pageantry. It is never too filled with Ferrer. To the brilliant Iago of "Othello," he has added another memorable recreation of a classic. The staging, in which he must have had a hand, is perceptive and effective. The Lemuel Ayres scenery and costumes make a tasteful and resplendent frame for the production and Paul Bowles's incidental music is in the proper magical mood. "Cyrano de Bergerac" is a stunning revival.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 9, 1946

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

José Ferrer has administered a lively draft of tonic to this ailing season by staging "Cyrano de Bergerac" as though he meant it. Acting the part of the braggart romantic, he is appearing at the Alvin in a pulsating performance that makes full use of the modern theatre. Although "Cyrano" is no longer a modern play, it is still one of the most dashing ever written, particularly in the Brian Hooker version that preserves the bravura of the Rostand text in light verse of a modern idiom. Amid all the excitement, swashbuckling and old-fashioned ham that swept across the stage of the Alvin last evening, the theatre seemed again to be something worth enjoying and cherishing.

Like people who respect the theatre, Mr. Ferrer and his associates offer everything in abundance. Inside one of Lemuel Ayers' most decorative settings, the performance begins with a gusty scene and one of the most tingling duels of a generation. For when the astonishing Gascon whips out his sword he fights with finesse and ferocity like a man inspired. Elsewhere throughout the performance the pace slackens a little; and although Mr. Ferrer has already cut the text, there is still enough left to choke a printer's alley. Even the stoutest admirer of the hero of the long nose must weary a little from the sheer volume of words that pours off the stage. But this playgoer is registering no formal complaints, for the Ferrer "Cyrano" is rattling good theatre in the cloak-and-dagger vein.

Until Mr. Ferrer came along, this was Walter Hampden's part, as was the Brian Hooker version his text; and Mr. Hampden's Cyrano was his crowning achievement. There were times last evening when Mr. Hampden's voice seemed to be coming out of Cyrano's cloak, especially in the balcony scene. Mr. Hampden's greater height gave him a certain advantage in a part that is intended to overwhelm the play. After the first act, which is the best in this revival, Mr. Ferrer could do with a little more physical domination. The part is ham; it can stand all the ham an actor can put into it.

Apart from his mastery of costume drama, Mr. Ferrer is also an actor of keen intelligence who gets his humor, not out of the library, but out of his personal vigor and alertness. His Cyrano has a sardonic wit, a strutting style, a bombastic manner of speech and withal a shyness and modesty. For under Rostand's rodomontade this Cyrano has a streak of sadness. Without dimming the purple of Rostand's romantic scheme, Mr. Ferrer has preserved a trace of ordinary human feeling that redeems Cyrano from complete artificiality.

As a token of faith in honest theatre, Mr. Ferrer has surrounded himself with worthy associates. Frances Reid plays an enchanting Roxane with a skimming touch and daintiness of accent, as well as obvious enjoyment in the role. As the poetic pastry cook, Hiram Sherman's fussy and breathless clowneries are thoroughly enjoyable. Ernest Graves brings to the part of Christian a candor that is an improvement over the usual stuffed-shirt version. As Roxane's duenna, Paula Laurence manages to insert an impudent gleam that is comic. Ralph Clanton as the pompous Comte de Guiche is admirable; he manages to contribute an intelligible characterization to a wooden part.

Let everyone, therefore, be well bestowed—Melchor G. Ferrer for the direction, Mr. Ayers for the costumes and settings, Paul Bowles for the incidental music; and since the occasion is bountiful, say "Thank You" to the stage hands for moving the scenery. Mr. Ferrer has done "Cyrano" in the grand manner, like a man who gets fun as well as a living out of the theatre.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 9, 1946

Ferrer's 'Cyrano' a Picturesque Offering of a Grand Old Thriller

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If you want your theatre with a capital T, and you should, Jose Ferrer's "Cyrano de Bergerac" is your dish. This is The Works, by Rostand, in its splendid and familiar adaptation by Brian Hooker.

Here it all is—the pageantry, the bravado, the duels, the comedy, the purest of passion, the poetry, the humor and the low comedy. Besides being well established as a classic "Cyrano" is five jampacked acts of show business.

Mr. Ferrer, as producer and principal actor, has done well by this great cloak-and-sword piece. It is beautifully, excitingly set and costumed by Lemuel Ayres and carefully, intelligently cast. It is a revival of dignity and worth, and not an exhumation of the sort which has sorely troubled this struggling new season.

For a Cyrano Mr. Ferrer isn't quite the type, on first thought. He is smallish and thus, perhaps, not perfectly equipped physically to doff his felt or engage a hundred ruffians with his sword. Nor is his voice a sonorous one with rafter-ringing overtones.

On second thought, though—and on first sight—Mr. Ferrer is an excellent Cyrano. He is agile of body, supple of mind, and the craftiness of his Iago in "Othello" is with him still. His voice, though it never stretches for resonance, has considerable range, and the clarity of his speech is admirable.

Ironic to the End.

But, for all his grand passion for Roxane, Ferrer's Cyrano does not reach the unabashed pathos of Walter Hampden or of some of the de Bergeracs I saw many years ago in Paris. The current impersonation maintains an ironic spirit almost to the end. This observation is offered in a spirit of mild disappointment.

A goodly troupe of cavaliers, Gascons and ladies has been assembled. Frances Reid's Roxane is lovely to look at, lovely to hear, and Ralph Clanton's de Guiche is played with proper theatrical swagger. Leopold Badia and Ferrer have a well-executed duel, and Ferrer recites his ballad as though he really were making it up in the course of some important sword-work.

Ernest Graves as the beautiful but dumb Christian, Hiram Sherman as the simple baker, William Woodson as Le Bret and a number of others make a well-chosen and picturesque company. There is some incidental music by Paul Bowles, and Arthur F. Friend is credited with supervising the production. Melchor G. Ferrer, no relation to the star, has directed the play with a good eye for movement, and he permits Jose to indulge in an elaborate death.

New York Post

OCTOBER 9, 1946

Jose Ferrer's New 'Cyrano' Is Fresh and Effective

By Richard Watts Jr.

In his long and conscientious acting career, the veteran Walter Hampden never received such critical applause as when he appeared in the Brian Hooker adaptation of Edmond Rostand's distinguished romantic drama, "Cyrano de Bergerac." It was the ungracious suspicion of skeptics that the enthusiasm arose less from greatness of performance than from the cheering fact that in the Rostand play Mr. Hampden achieved a flesh-and-blood quality usually absent from his schoolmasterish playing, but, anyway, he was effective enough to establish a standard in the role for a generation of playgoers. Now it may be said of Jose Ferrer that he has established a new and higher standard.

Having been absent in foreign parts when Mr. Ferrer acted Iago to Paul Robeson's Othello, I, for one, was not prepared for the excellence of his work last night. Neither in stature nor personal equipment does he seem equipped for romantic or heroic acting, and his portrayal of the great-nosed soldier-poet, for all its dashing agility, lacks something in both respects. He does, however, atone for such physical and temperamental handicaps by so much intelligence, discrimination and general skill in the reading of lines and the understanding of character that his performance takes on a quality of distinction.

The production, too, is a generally admirable one. Not only are the supporting roles played with unusual effectiveness for such frantically subordinate characterizations, but the staging and, in particular, those ordinarily lifeless duels have a vitality and movement about them that keep "Cyrano" from seeming the endless and static monologue it can so readily become.

What, at this date, is there left to be said about this classic of the French romantic theatre? That it is pretty much a one-character play, that it seems to take an unconscionable time to pass a given point and that its comedy has its trying aspects—these are matters not to be denied. Nor does any one ever try to deny them.

Many of its dramatic devices have a way of seeming naive and outmoded to our self-consciously sophisticated theatrical tastes, while its frank and unashamed romantic spirit and its gestures of sentimental self - sacrifice tempt a day embarrassed by such things to cynical laughter. Nevertheless, somehow no one ever does laugh at "Cyrano" in the wrong places, nor has any generation of theatregoers grown tired of it or failed to be moved by its romanticism.

The reason isn't difficult to find. Its romantic spirit may be shameless, but it is also authentic and curiously heart-warming. Its dash, its gestures and its heroism do not seem fabricated but are deeply-felt and have the ring of a fine sincerity about them. The emotions appealed to are basic and elementary, and the appeal is made by an author of intelligence, poetic relish, imagination and lyric emotion. It is deservedly a romantic masterpiece.

When Brian Hooker's version of the Rostand original was first heard it seemed fresh and moving; an excellent creative achievement in its own right. Now, after all of those years, it still seems fresh and unpretentious, chiefly because Mr. Hooker had such skill in such matters, but in part, I think, because the new production has tinkered with it here and there and given it an added liveliness without losing the original spirit.

As I have said, the minor roles are well played. In particular, Ralph Clanton is an impressive De Guiche; Ernest Graves a sympathetic, not too doltish Christian; Hiram Sherman as comic a Ragueneau as the somewhat faded humorous role of the pastry cook allows, and Frances Reid a believable Roxane. Additional aid is provided by Lemuel Ayers' sets and Paul Bowles' incidental music.

It is probably a fine thing for the soul of every theatregoing generation for it to encounter its own production of "Cyrano," and Mr. Ferrer has given his particular age group an excellent one.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 9, 1946

Ferrer a Virile Cyrano in Alvin Revival

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Cyrano de Bergerac" is unabashed romance and poetry. These same qualities which make it a great museum piece, give it great beauty.

To any rabid fan of drama "Cyrano" must always remain a favorite. There probably never has been written a play more purely theatrical.

Here is the 17th century poet and soldier, as daring, vain and sentimental as a combined Douglas Fairbanks and Errol Flynn, but for the ugliness of his enormous nose. He loves Roxane. And he devotes his life to preserving her belief that a handsome boor she loves has the soul of Cyrano.

The play is long and has the quaintness of any tale about "long ago." Each of its five acts is crafty drama spun with glowing poetic lines.

Ferrer's Performance Vigorous.

As it must be, the flesh and the soul of the play is Cyrano himself. Jose Ferrer does him every justice in a throbbing vigorous performance.

He plays with the same disdain for reciting that made his Iago so electric. Here Cyrano's love of verse is spontaneous. When he speaks a vivid thought in his own singing words, there is no thought of selling it to his listeners. He knows it is good.

Ferrer's poet is young. He moves with the lithe spring of a man who can fight with a sword, and win against a hundred.

The first act duel is inventive and breath-takingly real.

Cyrano a Virile Ham.

This Cyrano is weak and tender only in his love for Roxane. He is a virile ham in his arrogant lack of humor about himself, and flamboyant in the wit he deals scalpel-like to others.

Ferrer's performance reaches a peak toward the end of the fourth act in the battle scene. It is a heart-breaking moment when he almost wins Roxane. There the sadness of his past and future fate snickers at him derisively.

Roxane becomes tender and spirited in the hands of Frances Reid. When she begs for more colorful admiration in the balcony scene she is no moonstruck ninny, but a young lady demanding her due. In the last convent scene she is mature enough to appreciate the real tragedy of Cyrano.

Sherman a Mild Buffoon.

Hiram Sherman does an artful job on Ragueneau, the versifying baker. It is easy to make Ragueneau a clown, but Sherman keeps the little buffoon mild and so much the funnier.

Ralph Clanton is a sonorous and picturesque de Guiche, swaggering and insolent in the grand manner. Ernest Graves is the handsome and hesitant Christian, beloved of Roxane; and Paula Laurence makes a striking, mannered duenna.

Lemuel Ayers has set "Cyrano" in warm romantic colors and sweeping vistas.

Rostand's drama is not only great verse in print, but a work that has enjoyed enormous popularity as a living play for half a century. Living may become abrupt and mechanical, but the tender passions and the violent pride "Cyrano" tells of are as changeless as human nature.

"Cyrano de Bergerac"—*continued*

PM

OCTOBER 10, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

A New 'Cyrano' And a Good One

PM Reviews

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

I suspect that, after *Hamlet*, *Cyrano* is the "classic" that the greatest number of people would choose to see in the theater. You might challenge their taste, but you could hardly fail to understand their reasons. For Rostand's play offers all those dashing, pathetic, impossibly romantic things for which the human heart secretly hungers; offers them in abundance, moreover, and offers them with authority. *Cyrano* is Dumas with a difference. It is Dumas made more sophisticated, but it is also Dumas made more sentimental, for its hero is the wryest as well as the cleverest of swashbucklers. Cyrano's plume sets him above the rest of his world, but Cyrano's nose sets him apart from it. Yet without the nose, the plume would never have waved so proudly.

Rostand's compound of rhetoric and romance still stands up, at any rate; stands up, indeed, very sturdily in the full-bodied production that Jose Ferrer has given it, with Mr. Ferrer himself as an admirable Cyrano. The play is certainly much too long, but then it no doubt always was; its humor is sometimes haggard; and its biggest scene, the lovemaking in the darkness, never quite goes down with me, even on the terms that it is offered. But however fulsome and old-fashioned the medium Rostand used, he was generally master of it, and of the framework as well as the frills. *Cyrano* is bulging, unblushing theater. The Brian Hooker translation is an uncommonly effective one, and if it has not the reach of the best of Rostand's rhetoric, it preserves the inventiveness and the vigor.

* * *

As for Mr. Ferrer's Cyrano, those of us who had seen only Walter Hampden in the part will warmly welcome it. Compared with Mr. Hampden, Mr. Ferrer may not seem as much better a Cyrano as he is better an actor, for the role adapts itself to almost any variety of the higher hamming. But Mr. Ferrer has given it, to begin with, all the dash and strut it needs, and gone on to exploit its color and humor, and not to over-play its all-too-tempting pathos. He has seen Cyrano as he must be seen if the play is not to degenerate into romantic mouthwash and cloak-and-sword monkey-shines—has seen him, that is, as a prince of self-dramatizers. The nose, like the vulture to Prometheus in the sonnet, becomes something Cyrano is almost attached to; and out of his defeat in love, his pride in poverty, his skill in self-sacrifice, he has wrested a saving attitude, a long opportunity to play-act and pretend, which is the classic compensation for the frustrated romantic. Cyrano could never play his role so well if he did not get such rueful satisfaction out of it.

The evening is Mr. Ferrer's, but the production backs him up. Melchor Ferrer's staging is animated; Lemuel Ayers' sets and costumes are colorful; and most of the supporting parts are nicely played. Frances Reid is a charming-looking and prettily earnest Roxane; Ernest Graves does very well as Christian; William Woodson is a good forthright Le Bret; and Hiram Sherman and Paula Laurence milk the roles of Ragueneau and Roxane's duenna of what there is in them. A new generation may see a better *Cyrano* than the previous generation ever saw; and a new season may at last plume itself that something really satisfactory has arrived.

—Louis Kronenberger

"Hear That Trumpet"

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 8, 1946

'Hear That Trumpet' Is a Muted Drama of Love in the Swing Set

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Arthur Hopkins, one of the most sensitive and sagacious drama directors of our time, believes that a director's function is not to put something into an actor, but rather to help bring out what the actor already has within himself. To this philosophy I subscribe, and it is one of the reasons why a Hopkins production is of more than ordinary interest, whether the play be a commercial hit or not.

In "Hear That Trumpet," which he offered last evening at the Playhouse, Mr. Hopkins has done some interesting bringing-out. He has taken six swing musicians, only one of whom has had any experience with stage roles, and made passable players of them. Apparently unwilling to try anything resembling histrionics, he has evoked as much naturalness as possible—with the unhappy result that the play is too much a monotone, too deliberately paced.

Nor is the play itself enough—for, if a director can't put anything into actors which wasn't there in the first place, neither can a manager put into a script more than the author has given it. Orin Jannings' drama is an affectionate but superficial glimpse of the lives and minds of the swing set, lacking the drive and sound heart, for instance, of Dorothy Baker's excellent novel, "Young Man With a Horn."

Villain Wants His Girl.

The time of "Hear That Trumpet" is 1945 and the place is Chicago, in an apartment inhabited or frequented by a set of pallid musicians. Even the Negro clarinetist looks pallid. The author tries to persuade us that at this time in Chicago there is a man of mysterious influence—an evil man of good repute who will hire killings done to get what he wants.

What this man wants is a girl. She was his mistress once, but she has fallen for and married the head man of the band—a young trumpeter. Under the pretense of friendship, the girl's former protector sponsors the outfit, getting it good playing and recording dates; but his underlying purpose is to wreck the group.

A little poison in some tea clears up the situation—but this is in the third act, and even this mild melodrama is not enough to revive a flagging interest in some conversation which has been going round and round and, like the music in the old song, coming out in the same old place.

Among the musicians, the chap with the stage experience comes out best. He is Ray Mayer, who provides almost all of the laughs and almost all of the punch with his impersonation of a hard-drinking pianist. He looks like a drunk, talks like a drunk and plays just dandy.

Bobby Sherwood, a nice-looking lad with an authentic career as a bandleader, plays the ever-loving trumpeter with a certain modest charm—but even so he toots better than he talks. Marty Marsala, an established drummer in the swing trade, gives a believable and enjoyable performance as himself, and so does Sidney Bechet, the clarinetist.

For the sex element Mr. Hopkins has put his faith in stage actors. The smooth villain is Frank Conroy, who still seems to be playing Mr. Brink in "On Borrowed Time." The girl is Audra Lindley, whose job it is to be remorseful, rueful and so loving that she doesn't mind taking a little poisoned tea herself to help her trumpeter lad. She manages pretty well—but, like the others, she is playing with a mute clamped on.

During the course of the evening the boys have a couple of jam sessions. The noise is a slight relief.

'HEAR THAT TRUMPET.'

Play by Orin Jannings; staged by Arthur Hopkins; setting by Woodman Thompson; presented by Arthur Hopkins at the Playhouse, Monday evening, October 7, 1946. The cast:

Mumford	Sidney Bechet
Alonzo Armonk	Frank Conroy
Dinger Richardson	Bobby Sherwood
Floyd Amery	Ray Mayer
Abba	Bart Edwards
Rocco	Marty Marsala
Erica Marlowe	Audra Lindley
Skippy	Philip Layton
Sally Belle	Lynne Carter
Cleasy	Raymond Bramley

The New York Times

OCTOBER 8, 1946

The Notes Are Clear

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Amid all the brooding and the distractions there is the material for a first-rate play in Orin Jannings' "Hear That Trumpet," which Arthur Hopkins put on at the Playhouse last evening. Since Mr. Jannings is a very evasive writer, this notice will be evasively appreciative of what he has done. For he has assembled an interesting group of hot musicians, set them to playing and talking, and woven around them a few contemporary notions—like the inhumanity of the civilian world to soldiers who have come home from the fighting.

If Mr. Jannings is writing in the vein of Chekhov, his maundering will have to be regarded as a virtue, the ambiquities of text and performance will have to be accounted classical and therefore beyond the range of criticism. But if he is writing like an American who knows something about the theatre, one can only conclude that "Hear That Trumpet" has wasted some excellent material by not making up its mind. Although Mr. Jannings seems to be improvising a drama as hot musicians improvise jam sessions, his characters get entangled in a number of loose ends.

Everyone would be disposed to like his characters. They include the congenial members of a hot band that is happily playing for dimes and quarters in random Chicago dives. At least two of the players are buddies from overseas who are now rejoicing at home. In the first act, their pleasant preoccupation with hot music is strangely interrupted by a man from the business world who wants to make them respectable, and by the intrusion of his girl who wants the trumpet player for her own. Until the man from the business world is eliminated, the band goes to pieces and stops making music.

Mr. Jennings is not a literal writer, which is very much to his credit. And while his play is frittering along, he writes some pungent scenes, particularly when the piano player dominates them. For the piano player lays about him with wry and caustic humor, denouncing the perfidy of the world in some very surprising billingsgate. All the fraternal scenes between the band players are refreshingly written. But there is also some extraordinarily bad writing when "Hear That Trumpet" becomes portentous—"something to fracture the drooling delerium," says the pensive heroine in one of her blacker moments. As orchestrater of mystic symbols, Mr. Jennings is inexpert. With all proper appreciation for the freshness of his characters and environment, it is still hard to decide what "Hear That Trumpet" is getting at.

It is to be feared that Mr. Hopkins has not helped him as much as possible. The performance has a loose texture and tolerates some unhappy acting. As the band leader, Bobby Sherwood is giving an attractive performance, both as trumpet and drama player. As the saturnine piano player, Ray Mayer is superb. He adds to a well-written role the passion of alert acting, and he draws a sharp cutting-blade through the whole performance.

As the heroine who is trying to use an evil stepstone into a shining future, Audra Lindley has a particularly enigmatic role to play, and she has not managed to clarify it much. Nor does Lynne Carter do much except make strange noises with the part of the piano player's moll. Frank Conroy as the devil's advocate in terms of Chicago gangster technique radiates his native benevolence. No matter what you do with Mr. Conroy, he is never a really bad man. There is a cheerful and delightful performance by Sidney Bechet as a clarinet reed bird, and particularly in the last act Marty Marsala puts some ingratiating touches to his portrait of the drummer.

Unlike the other plays of this nitwit season, "Hear That Trumpet" brings some picaresque characters into the theatre and attempts to dramatize them spontaneously in a pensive rather than an electric style. But Mr. Jannings is no master of the medium, nor has Mr. Hopkins contrived a steadily evocative performance. Although you can hear that trumpet, you cannot always hear what it is saying.

Journal American

OCTOBER 8, 1946

'Hear That Trumpet' Opens at Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

You've got to do a powerful lot of high-class listening to hear that trumpet with which Arthur Hopkins' first production of the new season is so persistently concerned. Last night, at the Playhouse, everything and everybody seemed dead set against it.

Everything and everybody but the likely looking lad who blew it, Bobby Sherwood, the big horn-blower, worked with every odd opposing, from the inexperienced cooling system which failed to function properly to the inexperienced dramatist who failed to function likewise.

This inexperienced dramatist who failed to function properly is the Orin Jannings about whom we've all been hearing, the promising young playwright whose "Hear That Trumpet" was unjustly celebrated before Arthur Hopkins brought it onto Broadway.

His also is "On the Beach" which, while unproduced, has bloomed into a legend. Be that play as it may, just what Mr. Jannings has to offer is not made manifest in 48th st. Nothing, however, is done to help him. Not even by Mr. Hopkins!

Ever since Dorothy Baker's "Young Man With a Horn" appeared to glorify Bix Biederbecke —which was 1938—I've felt that there's a play in the life and longing of one of these red-hot windjammers. "Hear That Trumpet" is not that play.

* * *

Not That Play

On further thought, "Hear That Trumpet" is most certainly not that play. Instead, it is a prolonged and unprofitable on-stage affair in which a handsome young horn-blower called Dinger Richardson is wooed and won by a character called Erica Marlowe.

Don't ask me why Erica Marlowe has her hungry heart set on the handsome young horn-blower called Dinger Richardson. For Erica already has a gentleman friend called Alonzo Armonk. There's nothing within, or without, reason Alonzo won't do for her.

At the Playhouse, he goes so far as to buy her a hot-band of her own, a sort of Psychopathic Six of which Dinger is leader and Mumford, Floyd, Abba, Rocco and Skippy follow him with clarinet, piano, bass viol, drum and trombone respectively.

But somewhere in the three acts and twice that many scenes, the best laid plans of Alonzo run amok. The winsome young windjammer marries his Erica Marlowe; his Psychopathic Six break up; and somebody puts poison in Alonzo's tea.

Frankly, I don't remember exactly how it ends. But, as any end would be a happy one, let's assure ourselves that everything's for the best in a rickety contraption; that the week's still young; that there're four more openings to come.

* * *

Bobby's Charming

Bobby Sherwood, a favorite, I read, on screen, air and with GIs overseas, plays the role of Dinger Richardson with youthful quietude and charm. And his trumpet is by him beloved as if he were Gene Autry and his hautboy were his horse.

But when acting honors are the orders of this report, it's Ray Mayer who comes into his own. His portrait of Floyd Amery, pessimistic piano-player with a dead mouse in his pocket and a dead love in his heart, is better than the play deserves.

Frank Conroy, down from his high tree in "On Borrowed Time," can climb right up again as far as "Hear That Trumpet" is concerned. And, as Erica Marlowe, Audra Lindley may know what she's doing. Ask her, though, and see if she cares!

There're others whose names, fames and raison d'etre elude me. But, taken as they are, they're nice enough young fellows with their hearts set on going back into Bobby Sherwood's Band. Believe me, they'll soon be there!

They'll soon be there because "Hear That Trumpet" is a pretentious little play, about pretentious little people who mean nothing to you, me or the other fellow. Included in this negative summing up are the producer, the playwright and Woodman Thompson, "designer" of the setting!

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 8, 1946

'That Trumpet' Is Keyed to Blues

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Arthur Hopkins has employed both professional actors and musicians in "Hear That Trumpet." He has keyed them together deftly in a melancholy mood.

These artists of jazz are fanatical and inarticulate. Their instinct for their music is true and denied it, they grow confused and hurt. They had hoped the war was fought for the sort of standards they employ.

It is also the story of a girl who discovers what a high price must be paid for the perfection the artists need.

Suggests Firing Clarinetist.

Erica, after a loveless affair with an older lawyer, Armonk, meets a trumpeter, Dinger, and the boys in his band. The musicians do not get good jobs because they have "mixed personnel." Their fine clarinetist is a Negro.

Armonk would promote them with no appreciation of what their music means to them, he suggests that Dinger let Mumford and his clarinet go.

Erica marries Dinger, and Armonk sets out to destroy the band. The older and wiser Mumford walks out, when fights over him ruin the band's reputation.

Under Armonk's influence the band breaks up entirely. Erica sees that Dinger without his music is nothing. Their marriage has become meaningless.

To give Dinger and his boys the music that is their breath of life she is willing to make the gesture of killing Armonk and herself.

The Villain Is Killed.

Erica is discovered by Dinger before the sleeping pills take effect. Armonk has died in a crash when his car skidded on the ice. And the boys whom Erica had summoned together, again rend the air with their music.

Jazz opens the play and closes it. With wild outbursts or pale offstage blues it points the mood of the show.

Mr. Hopkins has done a fine job of directing this play. It is gentle and melancholy most of the time, and there is very little action. He gives its forlorn mood constant interest. Without tricks he makes the most passive moments sympathetic.

Miss Lindley Scores.

Audra Lindley is extraordinary as Erica, a part which almost never changes key. It is important that she underplay the role to keep a balance with the members of the cast who are musicians rather than actors. With little overt variation she suggests an emotional woman finding courageous values.

Frank Conroy similarly makes Armonk a shrewd and ruthless man. It is a casual surface of indifference that reveals his callousness.

Bobby Sherwood, the young orchestra leader, plays Dinger with a gentle force, but is not so successful at suggesting the musician's demoralization when he becomes a restaurant cashier.

Ray Mayer is not only an excellent pianist but a somewhat experienced actor as well. As Dinger's closest friend he is wonderfully punchy. He does a hypnotic job of the drunk scene when, in Chicago Calypso style, he tells Dinger and Erica, to his own accompaniment, how he has been threatened by hired murderers.

A Warm Philosopher.

Sidney Bechet makes a wise and warm philosopher of the controversial clarinetitist and the drummer, Marty Marsala, gives an amusing sing-song dopiness to his lines.

As a sort of "Born Yesterday" vocalist, Lynne Carter subdues her moronic character until she is more real than theatrical.

But for its bright margins of music, "Hear That Trumpet" is a quiet play. Despite the suggested violence it is a gentle story of the little youth trying to dress in the big ideal for which he fought the war.

Its air is of having been done by all concerned with love.

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New York Post

OCTOBER 8, 1946

'Hear That Trumpet' Opens; Play With 'Jazz Overtones'

By Richard Watts Jr.

There may be a more unpleasant way of beginning my season as New York Post drama critic than by saying hard words about an Arthur Hopkins production, but right now I am unable to think of it. Not only is Mr. Hopkins' record in the theatre a particularly illustrious and high-minded one, but there is the added cause for regret that his new offering has one or two moments that bring back happy memories of his famous old success, "Burlesque," in which he did for the hoofers and comics what the current "Hear That Trumpet" apparently strives to do for the jazz musicians. Unhappily, it simply doesn't work out.

Although a cloudiness in both the writing and the direction makes it slightly uncertain, it appears that Orin Jannings, the author of "Hear That Trumpet," was intending to express something of the fanatical spirit about their art and the sense of comradeship in music that he believes exists in the idealistic members of a jazz band. It seems to be his conviction that this spirit and comradeship can combine in a kind of artistry which is capable of giving jazz a high quality of excitement and ecstasy. I must say that his play is most successful at this when it stops talking and lets the six band players in the cast get in their hot licks.

The Author's Idea?

Whatever there may be in the author's idea—and I am not even sure that this is really what he is trying to say—it is an interesting and plausible contention, but there are not many moments when he succeeds in dramatizing it. To present his narrative, he takes a group of young men and an old Negro, who know and understand each other and are happiest when playing together as a team; gives the trumpeter and the piano player a special bond through a long wartime companionship; introduces a bitter and unhappy young woman who finds relief only in their playing, and brings in a villain. A lot of things have gone wrong with his story, but it is that villain who does as much harm to the plot as he does to the hero and heroine.

This disagreeable fellow, who preys upon neurotic young women, hates ex-service men and goes about hypocritically pretending that he has lost a son in the Pacific, sets out to break up the band, more, I gathered, because a menace was needed than for any other discernible reason. His most malign method is to use race prejudice, causing gangsters at a night club to attack the Negro clarinet player and throw the six companions out of their job. This scheming individual, who goes by the rather splendid name of Alonzo Armonk, comes to a dismal end, but not in time to keep Mr. Jannings' ideas about the spirit of hot jazz intact.

Several Good Scenes

There are several effective scenes in "Hear That Trumpet," scenes in which the author does manage to suggest the nervous and electric quality of what I judge to be his theme—and it is worth noting that all of them seem to be played by an excellent actor named Ray Mayer. Mr. Mayer, who is an expert performer on both the piano and the emotions, has the role of a war-weary, embittered ex-sergeant, with frayed nerves and alcoholic instincts, and he succeeds in showing the mounting, hysterical tension of the man with striking dramatic skill. He is, indeed, an actor to be watched.

The young trumpet player, who is the leader of the band and the husband of the girl neurotic, is performed by Bobby Sherwood attractively and to good effect. Less happy is the experienced Frank Conroy, who is entangled in the melodramatic villainy of Mr. Alonzo Armonk and never manages to free himself.

The part of the girl, a difficult and not altogether clarified one, is played by Audra Lindley, who portrays the metallic side of the heroine's character more surely than she does her warmer and more tortured aspects. The minor band players of the cast satisfy the requirements of the drama in both acting and music.

It is not difficult to see what Mr. Hopkins saw in the script of "Hear That Trumpet," since it must have at once reminded him of an old success and hinted at the possibilities for dramatizing the spell of jazz on the perhaps neurotic modern temperament. But it required far more work and a more successful production than have been accorded it.

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 8, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Some Flat Notes

A HOT band becomes a cold potato in the dramatic stanzas of "Hear That Trumpet." The Playhouse program describes this Orin Jannings concoction as "a new play with jazz overtones." The overtones are clearly audible as six swing musicians engage in several catchy jam sessions. The new play is difficult to find. What is discernible of it spraddles through six scenes of increasing ineptitude until a palpable deus ex machina starts the boys sending again for the final curtain. They should have stuck to their jamming throughout.

• • •

Not that these tin pan alley executants turned thespians are not generally adequate to their acting assignments in "Hear That Trumpet." Bobby Sherwood, as the man with a horn who almost gets thrown for a loss by a comehither girl and her rich and vengeful protector, plays the part with a rather engaging assurance. Ray Mayer does him one better in the part of a piano-thumping war veteran who indulges in sardonic flights of humor and pathos, and Sidney Beehet is fine as a Negro blues fancier. Even Bart Edwards, who twangs a bass viol during the overtones, remembers his few lines and gets on and off stage without falling down. What is wanting is anything of any conceivable theatrical consequence to warrant their doubling in greasepaint.

• • •

The author has taken a rusty melodramatic clothes horse and decked it out with more than jazz overtones. In the clipped conversational encounters, which consist of endless rhetorical queries such as "what has becomes of us?" there are suggestions of mystical profundity. In the offstage fights which the band gets into because of its Negro clarinetist, there is a hint of racial inequality. When it comes to the climax, resolving the stuttering action in an attempted murder that providentially looks like a mere automobile accident, all the overtones are lost in an arrant bit of plot nonsense and the boys jive happily ever after.

• • •

While one may not expect too much in the way of acting from a professional trombone player or a drummer, the performing of the regulars leaves much to be desired. Audra Lindley tries to look sultry and hexed at one and the same time as the heroine of the piece and succeeds in merely sulking. Frank Conroy is vaguely menacing as the big shot who loses his girl to a band leader and tries to get even with the latter, but his characterization is generally preposterous. Arthur Hopkins takes credit for the staging as well as the production of "Hear That Trumpet." He has failed to invigorate the season in both capacities.

PM

OCTOBER 9, 1946

—Kronenberger—

A Trumpet Sounding Taps

PM Reviews

HEAR THAT TRUMPET

A hot jazz band is playing lustily when the curtain goes up on *Hear That Trumpet*, and playing lustily again when the final curtain comes down. The two hours in between, however, are considerably less animated: there is very little jazz-playing, and very little play. The pianist in the band sits down and strums quite often; and it might fairly be said that Mr. Jannings offers the dramatic equivalent of strumming even oftener. There is no pedal to his writing, and there is drift rather than development. Here and there he hits a few promising notes, only to wander off into something foreign, or wind up with something banal. What alone holds the play together is a hackneyed, rather trashy plot that does not hold the audience.

Mr. Jennings may go on to write better plays; what badly defeats him in this one—beyond very uneven writing—is a great want of technique, a great inability to weave the strands of his play together. He is, a little sentimentally, concerned with a group of struggling jazz players attached to their work and to one another; he is, a little indignantly, concerned with their having suffered scars in the war and been offered no security by the peace; he is, a little derivatively concerned with a marriage between the young bandleader and a neurotic young woman of uncertain origin; and he is, quite meretriciously, concerned with the menace of the girl's former lover, a big shot who revenges his loss of her by putting the finger on the band.

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Mr. Jannings neither brings all this into focus, nor gives it much force. You can sense his feeling for his musicians, but he seldom makes anything vivid of their lives, or even gives you a sharp back-stage picture of their work. You feel his desire to treat his love story honestly, but it subsides into routine "straight talks" and is marred by the fuzzy outlines of the heroine. As for the menacing big shot (whom the girl eventually sends to his death, to insure a machine-made happy ending) he is miles away from real life without being much help at melodrama. Mr. Jannings is most successful with the pianist, a war veteran with lacerated nerves and bitter humor.

Both Mr. Jannings, in his playwriting, and Arthur Hopkins, in his directing, have tried, it would seem, to play down rather than up; but this has worked against them. *Hear That Trumpet* lacks pace as much as it lacks body; and as theater it soon becomes tedious. Ray Mayer, as the pianist, and Bobby Sherwood, as the bandleader, turn in attractive performances. But Audra Lindley, as the girl, is hogtied by her part and hurt by her manner; while Frank Conroy plays the big shot with so much detachment it seems odd he didn't check out of the story long before it did him in.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

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'Hear That Trumpet', Offered at Playhouse, Flounders After Brisk Beginning.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Arthur Hopkins is a showman of our town who produces the plays he likes, and he has liked some good ones. I've gone along with him on nearly everything from "The Jest" to "Burlesque." But the report on his new piece, "Hear That Trumpet," presented last night at the Playhouse, must be one of sharp dissent.

"Hear That Trumpet" is about the troubles of a jazz band and of young men who were in the war and who are carrying it with them every minute. The play has some effective scenes and the first act is rather a good one, but with the opening of the second act the floundering begins. Playwright Orin Jannings's dialogue, while pungent at times, often becomes highflown and artificial. His excursions into the abstract are not to his play's advantage.

Jannings tells a story of a wealthy and slippery lawyer who is induced by a strangely confused girl to give his support to a jazz band, disrupted by the war and trying to get going again. She complicates matters by falling in love with the young band leader, an ex-G. I., and marrying him.

The elderly sponsor doesn't take to this at all. He makes it tough for the boys, getting them into fights, having them thrown out of jobs, setting the underworld on them, and almost wrecking the marriage. His price for laying off is getting the girl back. The desperate young wife finally decides that it's up to her to get rid of Alonzo Armonk and she does the job very neatly. The reunited musicians are blaring away at full fury when the play comes to its pat—its quite too pat—conclusion. That band could have helped out in the long second act, which is the play's worst.

Arthur Hopkins, being an experimentalist in all his distinguished years as a showman, has now tried turning real musicians into actors. He is rather successful in the cases of Bobby Sherwood, who plays the band leader (and the trumpet), and Ray Mayer, pianist, who can't forget the war and doesn't want to. Sidney Bechet (clarinet), the Negro of the band, turns in a likable characterization. Audra Lindley is the girl who finds the man of her life in the young musician. She has a definite style in her playing, but her studied tension gets pretty wearing as the evening goes along.

Frank Conroy, a smooth and sure actor for all these many seasons, and always likely to turn up in a Hopkins production, makes Armonk sinister enough, and quite pathetic at the finish. The setting of Woodman Thompson is depressing.

"Hear That Trumpet" is an uneven and uncertain play, and one that fails to sustain its early promise.